Wolf-Trap

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Wolf-Trap

by purplesocrates

Summary

Will is a widowed omega looking after Trap Manor and Estate until his ward, Walt comes of age. He is unable to gain a lot of new income as he is seen as just an omega, a widowed, broken one at that. Walt, if he had been an alpha, well, that would have been different. People would have seen the estate as having a future. As it was, with just a childless, pre-bonded omega and his beta ward, there was little hope of anything here.
Walt was smart, though and had prospects. He had worked hard and kept up his mother's acquaintances with the help of Will. Luckily for them both Will was well respected, for an omega, and, he was sure, people took pity on him. It was mostly their love of Molly that helped to assure Walt's future. The future of the estate, however, was another issue. If Will could keep it alive until Walt married, then perhaps, but being a beta meant a match with an alpha would mean losing his family name, and a match with an omega or another beta would mean little financial gain.
Will doesn't really think about his own future. His focus is on Walt. He is old now, too old for any attachments, and is pre-bonded and widowed. Who would want to take on such a creature?

Notes

My first regency fic! EEK!

See the end of the work for more notes

Trap Manor

Moonlight is spilling in from the open window onto the wooden floor. The room is freezing, but Molly wanted to feel the air on her skin one last time, so Will had opened the window before crawling into bed with her, holding her close, feeling every one of her last breaths. Her eyes flicker open, and she looks up at him. She smiles despite the effort it takes her.

'You will look after him? When I'm gone,' her voice is as thin as tracing paper, and he can feel the effort it takes her to speak. Every word is caught and comes out as a whisper.

'You know I will, Molly, rest now, don't worry about Walt,' he says this at the same volume as her. He kisses her forehead, cold and clammy. 'He will always remember you. I will make sure of it.'

'I feel like I should apologise,' she says and tries to laugh but does not manage more than a deep, stuttering breath.

'For what?'

'For dying,' she says.

He smiles now. Even in death, she has grace. 'I know it's not your choice.'

'I am sorry, nonetheless, for the pain, all this will cause,' she says, he can see her pain as she speaks, and he wishes more than anything he could take her place.

'There is nothing you need to be sorry for, my love. I am sorry that I could not save you. I feel I failed you.'

'Never, my love, never, you never could. Have we been happy these few years? You, me and Walt?'

'Blissfully so,' Will replies, and he means it. When they first met, they were both broken creatures, and they have saved each other in many ways. Walt has been an unexpected delight in Will's life - he never imagined himself a father, but now he feels that fierce Omegan loyalty deep in his bones for the boy and, of course, for his mother, who will not last the night. He fears her loss, not just because of his love for her and her son's love, but because he has no idea how this will affect him physically. They are bonded, and he can feel something inside him, even now, fading with her. He knows if it weren't for Walt, he would just die here with his alpha in their bed. Instead, he must continue, no matter what.

'Will, I…' She is fading, and he leans down to kiss her lips once more.

'It's alright, you can rest now.'

'Don't leave…'

'I will stay with you, my love. You are not alone. Close your eyes. I love you, and Walt loves you.'

She closes her eyes, and he watches as she fades. The rest of the night, her breathing becomes slower and slower until sometime just before the sun rises, she quietly slips away. He feels it as well as sees it. The bond between them aches, and he holds her body closer as tears stream down his face. Sunlight begins to flood the room, and he longs for the moon and night sky once more. Time cannot be stopped or reversed, no matter how much he longs for it. He knows he must leave this room and find Walt and tell the doctor all the things that will make it real. He waits until the sun has fully risen, and he can hear birdsong outside before he removes himself from the bed. He takes a moment kneeling beside the bed to kiss her hand once more.

Then he arranges the bed, so it looks as if she is just sleeping, placing her hands over her chest. He kisses her forehead and then closes the window. Her spirit, he hopes, made its way out and is not still trapped here. It is an old superstition, but he feels a pang of fear at the thought of her being unable to find peace.

He leaves the room, one last look over his shoulder, carefully closing the door behind him. His servant Winston appears. The man has clearly been awake all night.

'My lord, has she?' Winston says, taking a step closer to Will. He nods, unable to speak the words just yet. 'I'll send for the doctor. Young Master Walt is in his room with the nurse.'

'Thank you, Winston, I shall go to him now,' he says, putting a hand on Winston's shoulder to steady himself a moment. The servant covers Will's hand with his own.

'Sir, if there is anything we can do.'

'I know, thank you, Winston. Call for the doctor, as you said, and I shall see to Walt. Perhaps some breakfast and a fire in the library, none of us will feel like eating, but we should. Some tea would be good as well.'

'I shall see to it, Sir,' he says, and Will nods before moving off to make his way to Walt's bedroom.

Walt's chambers are at the other end of the corridor. Will makes his way in the quiet of the house to the door and slowly opens it. He peaks his head through, and he can see the nurse is led next to Walt on the bed. She turns when she hears the door and looks at Will. She carefully disentangles herself from Walt, who grumbles but does not wake. She quietly walks over to Will. He steps fully into the room and closes the door behind him. When the nurse reaches him, she hugs him, and he cannot help but smile.

'I am so sorry, Sir,' she says as they part.

'As am I. When did he fall asleep?'

'Just after midnight, Sir, I didn't want to leave him. I hope that's alright?'

'Of course, thank you very much for staying with him, Bev. Go and get some food. I shall wait with him until he wakes,' he says, and she squeezes his hand once more before leaving.

Will walks to Walt's bed and climbs in next to him. The boy's warmth is such comfort it almost makes Will cry once more, his scent, too, so similar to his mother's. He allows himself to find some peace as he knows that he will need to be strong for both of them once Walt wakes. He looks down at the sleeping boy, so small and delicate. Molly has been ill for months now, and they knew that she would likely pass this last night. She had not wanted Walt to see that. She had just wanted Will with her, Walt was angry, but Will knew the boy was also relieved, scared of his mother's illness and terrified of seeing her dead. They had said their goodbyes a few days ago, Will leaving them alone one afternoon, but he knows this will hurt.

The boy's eyes open and find Will. Walt knows before Will can even speak, the boy cries and curls himself into Will, who holds him, stroking his hair.

'I know, Walt, I know. She loved you,' he says as the boy continues to sob.

After a while, Walt calms down a little and looks up at Will. 'She's gone?'

'Yes, Walt, I am so sorry for it. It's you and me now.'

'Was she? Did it…?

'Was she in pain?' Will supplies and shakes his head. 'No, dear one, she fell asleep and then she passed. Her last thoughts were of you.'

Walt blinks his eyes clear of tears. 'They were?'

'Yes, she made me promise to take care of you, which, of course, I was going to anyway. I am going to take care of you, Walt. Everyone here is. You are not alone. You have me, the nurse, Winston, the cook, all of us. We are all here for you.'

'I know, but it's not the same, is it?'

'No, no, it's not,' Will says. His heart hurts for Walt and himself.

'What happens now?'

'Winston is calling for the doctor. He will be here soon. They will take her away, and then we can have the funeral in a few days. Right now, I think you should try to eat something. Let me help you get dressed, and then we can go to the library and sit in front of the fire. We can read the Arthur tales again, your mum's favourite, while we wait for the doctor.' Walt nods, and Will dries the boy's eyes with the sleeve of his shirt. 'It's going to be okay, I promise, Walt, it's going to be a bit horrid for a while, but then it will get better. We will do this together, you and I.'

'I know,' Walt says, and Will almost breaks again at his bravery.

Ten Years Later …

Will watches from the window as Walt leaves on the brown mare that has become the boy's favourite. It was his mother's before his. He cannot help but still see her in her son. He still feels that pang most days, as if he has forgotten something, lost something, and he cannot, no matter how hard he searches, seem to find it again. Those first few months after Molly's passing had been truly desperate. He would wake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, the sheets drenched, shaking uncontrollably. Winston would find him in the morning huddled in a corner in a nest of blankets. Between them all, they had managed to keep the worst of it from Walt. The nurse always waking Walt and getting him ready for the governess or to go out riding so Will had time to recover himself.

All the servants doted over Walt. They all pulled together like family to help the boy through it and to help Will. The broken bond sickness had taken months to ease, and even now, there were mornings where Will would wake covered in sweat and shaking. Walt was thriving, however, becoming the young man his mother always knew he would be. He was a beta, but he was a strong and sensible one, happy with himself. Molly had, of course, always told Walt that it didn't matter. It was all just biology. Of course, it did matter when it came to money

and inheritance. Until Walt came of age, Will was still in charge of the Trap estate and all the debts that came with it. He was unable to gain a lot of new income as he was seen as just an omega, a widowed, broken one at that. Walt, if he had been an alpha, well, that would have been different. People would have seen the estate as having a future. As it was, with just a childless, pre-bonded omega and his beta ward, there was little hope of anything here.

Walt was smart, though and had prospects. He had worked hard and kept up his mother's acquaintances with the help of Will. Luckily for them both Will was well respected, for an omega, and, he was sure, people took pity on him. It was mostly their love of Molly that helped to assure Walt's future. The boy had been offered an internship at a law firm in the city once he was eighteen. It had been organised through Margot, an old Verger family friend. Walt would be fine, Will was sure of it. The future of the estate, however, was another issue. If Will could keep it alive until Walt married, then perhaps, but being a beta meant a match with an alpha would mean losing his family name, and a match with an omega or another beta would mean little financial gain.

Will doesn't really think about his own future. His focus is on Walt. He is old now, too old for any attachments, and is pre-bonded and widowed. Who would want to take on such a creature?

He turns from the window and begins his work. He reads through the mornings' correspondence and is soon lost to thoughts of numbers and money, only disturbed by a gentle knock at the door.

'Yes, come in,' he says.

Winston appears. 'My apologies for disturbing you, Sir, but Lady Bloom is here to see you.'

'Alana is here?' Will says he does not remember her saying she would be in the area. She normally lets him know. 'Is she alright?'

'Oh yes, Sir, quite well, she just wishes to speak to you. I have suggested tea in the drawing-room.'

'Yes, I shall be down shortly,' Will says, shuffling the last of his papers.

'Very good, m'Lord,' Winston says and leaves.

Will finds Alana Bloom, Molly's sister, Walt's Aunt, radiant as her name suggests, sat by the window in the drawing-room waiting for him. She rises with her usual ease and elegance when he enters the room. She is a striking omega, beautiful dark hair coiled up on her head to accentuate her fine bone structure and pale skin. Her eyes are a clear blue. Today she is wearing a dress of pale pink silk and white lace. It looks like it costs enough to feed a village for a month. She is married to Margot Verger, an Alpha who is part of the Verger empire with her brother - a brother she has had committed so she could reign over the empire. The father only wanted a male alpha to inherit and not Margot. She and Alana found a way around this by declaring Mason Verger insane, not that hard as it turned out, as the alpha did indeed have

a penchant for manipulating young boys. They have a young son together, Henry, who luckily, or it is rumoured not so lucky but by dubious and illegal medical interference, was born an alpha, and so their reign is secured. As long as Mason Verger remains where he is.

'Alana, it is good to see you,' she says and takes his hand.

'I was worried. You did not let me know you were coming. Is everything alright?' Will asks as they sit on the couch nearest the fire.

'I am sorry to have worried you! Everything is fine. In fact, it is rather wonderful,' she says with a wide smile.

'What do you mean?' he asks.

'You must have heard? Surely?' Alana says and sighs. 'You work too hard, my dear Will. You do not go out. You are not seen in society near as much as you should be. It is just as well I always keep an eye and ear out on your behalf. Otherwise, these things would completely pass you by!'

'Alana, I have no idea as to what you are referring to!'

His sister-in-law laughs, and he feels a little irritated. It is always like this with her. She loves to have more information and gossip than anyone else and revels in being the first person in the know.

'Of course, you don't!' she says, brushing an errant hair from her face. 'Oh, Will, honestly!'

Before he can ask for more information, Winston appears with their tea which he seems to take an age to place and pour. Eventually, he leaves, and Alana begins to tuck into a scone.

'Are you going to tell me?' Will says, his patience having almost completely gone.

'Oh, Will I do apologise! Yes, well, the Wolfe estate has been sold, my dear!'

Will takes this in for a moment. The large estate that borders his own has changed hands a few times over the years. This is hardly news. It is a large property that costs a small fortune to upkeep. It has bankrupted more than a few who have taken it on. Trap Manor used to be a part of it but was sold off many generations ago to Molly's family.

'This is hardly exciting news. The estate gets sold off every few years. It's been empty for the last year.'

'I know that, but, this time, it's been bought by a Count! The Count!'

'The Count?' Will says he has no idea who Alana is referring to.

'Oh, Will, you really must keep up with society even if you are determined to not be a part of it! Count Hannibal Lecter!'

The name rings a vague bell with Will, but he can't quite place why. 'Isn't he a surgeon?'

'He was yes in his youth, but then he used his family's substantial wealth to buy up more property, and he now owns most of Baltimore! He has more than enough money to do up the estate and more. Plus, he has a ward! A very beautiful alpha girl who is about to come of age. This could be perfect for Walt!'

'Isn't the Count an alpha? Why doesn't he have his own children? A wife or husband?'

'He is an alpha, yes. However, he has never married. He adopted Abigail after her parents were killed. It was all very scandalous! There were rumours her father killed her mother before he was killed himself, and Abigail only barely escaped with her life. Count Lecter heard of her plight and adopted her. Regardless she is now about to be introduced to society and is moving next door! You must introduce yourself, Will, when he gets here. You simply must!'

'Alana, you know I cannot do that! I am an omega, an old one, pre-bonded I have no standing in society! There is no way I can approach a Count, an alpha at that.' Plus, Will thinks he really doesn't want to. He tolerated society when Molly was alive, but that was because he always had her as his support. He had to do very little other than sit there and nod. This may require him to be sociable, and he is not sure he knows how.

'That is why I have come. I can introduce you! Well, Margot can. She had met him a few times and has already mentioned you when she heard he bought the Wolfe estate.' Will grimaces. He hates the idea that he has been talked about in his absence. Alana does not seem to notice. 'She is on her way. She had some business to attend to. That dreadful brother of her's is threatening all sorts again.'

'Oh, is she alright?' Will asks. He actually likes Margot a lot, more than Alana in many ways, even though she is his sister-in-law.

'Oh yes, you know Margot! That's not important right now! What is important is that Margot and I are going to stay and introduce you and Walt to Lecter.'

'Do I have to be involved at all? Couldn't you just introduce Walt?'

'Oh, Will, that's not proper at all! Lecter will need to see who takes care of Walt, who influences him, all these things are important.'

'When does he arrive?'

'In a few days, Margot will be with us tomorrow so we can plan. Now, where is Walt? We must prepare him!'

'He's out riding, I believe. I saw him leave this morning,' Will says. 'I am sure he will be back soon.'

'Well, let's hope so we have much to discuss!' Alana says, tucking into her scone once more.

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Will and Walt are sat together in the library enjoying a post-dinner nightcap. Alana had finally gone to bed after talking herself to near exhaustion about Count Lecter and his ward. All the possibilities of what might happen. Walt had stayed mostly quiet, seemingly indulging his Aunt in her speculation, but Will had also seen the sadness in his wards eye and was not giving him a few moments to gather his thoughts.

'What do you think about all this, Will?' Walt asks as he stares into the fire, Will can see his mother's profile, and it makes him smile.

'I was going to ask you the same,' he says.

Walt looks at him and smiles. 'It is rare you don't have an opinion.'

'In this case, my thoughts are not as important as yours,' he says evenly. All he wants is for Walt to be happy. Alana is not wrong. If there was a match between Lecter's ward and Walt, it could secure the future of Trap Manor as well as Walt. Will also knows that marrying for money and matches do not always work out. After all, Walt's father was hardly a shining example.

'I know what you are thinking anyway,' Walt says, and Will smiles, laughing as it does not surprise him that Walt would say that.

'What am I thinking?'

'I know you worry about the future of the Manor, I do too, and Alana is not wrong that a match between myself as Lecter's ward would be advantageous. To me anyway, I am not sure what she would gain from it. I also know that, even though you and Mother never spoke of it, she and my father were matched, and he was far from good to her.'

Will takes a moment before responding. Walt's father is difficult territory. Molly never liked to speak of him, and Will has always respected her wishes. 'You are right. However, Lecter's ward would gain this Manor which could be once more brought into the Wolfe estate lands. This could be very lucrative. Do not dismiss your own charms. Your father was indeed a difficult man, but I would say there is no harm in meeting this girl. I will certainly not force you into doing anything you are not comfortable with, neither would your mother.'

'I know that. I kept trying to think what she would say about all this,' Walt muses. Will can see the boys eyes have wandered over to the Arthurian tales Molly used to read him, still centre stage on the shelf.

Will looks at the fire and smiles. 'She would have had a lot to say, I am sure,' Will imagines Molly, her outspoken voice always the loudest in any room. After all, she went through with Walt's father, she was never one to back down from a fight or to bite her tongue. He imagines lying in bed with her. She would always talk through her thoughts with him before they went to sleep. They would often spend nights awake talking and making love. He can still see the moonlight as it hit her skin, feel the softness of her hands as they explored him. He misses her every day still.

'What do you think she would have said?'

'I think she would have said that you should marry for love and not for financial gain. She had two marriages. One was for her family. She always said that even though that did not work out, she did not regret it for a moment as it gave her you. Our marriage was for love. We loved each other deeply, and I can honestly say I can imagine nothing better, and I certainly want that for you, and I know she would too.'

'As I get older, my memories of her fade,' Walt admits, and Will feels for him. He was so young when she passed.

'You were young, it is not surprising. It does not mean you love her any less. She is always with you. I see so much of you in here, still, as you grow older even more.'

'Really?'

'Yes, you look so much like her! You have her heart and strong will. You are more like her than you know. She lives on in you, Walt, and that gives me so much comfort.'

'What will you do? If I marry and inherit this place? Will you stay here?'

'I am not sure. I suppose it would depend on you, what you wanted,' he says. They have never talked about this. Will knows once Walt inherits everything, he has little reason to stay.

'I cannot imagine being here without you,' Walt says, and Will turns to see the boy looking at him, his expression and open and a little sad. 'You are my only family.'

'You will make a new family one day and need me no longer.'

'Do you really think that? You think I would just send you away?'

'No, I just mean that if you do not need me any more, then I would leave if that's what you wanted.'

Walt looks at Will, and he can see tears in his wards eyes. 'I would never do that, Will. You are the only father I have ever known. I will always need you. My mother loved you dearly, and I know she would always say you saved her.'

'I feel the same. We saved each other, Molly and I. You are a son to me, Walt, of course. No matter what happens, that will never change, and I will always be here for you. Always.'

'Good,' Walt says, and Will can sense the relief in the boy. 'Well, I suppose there is no harm in meeting this Count and his ward,' Walt says.

'No harm indeed,' Will agrees.

Wolf Estate

Chapter Summary

As was the custom at these events, they were announced as they entered the ballroom. Will turned to Walt, sensing the boy's nerves were as fraught as his own and did his best to give him an encouraging smile. Before they got much further in, a young girl in a pale pink dress comes running up to Walt. She has porcelain skin dappled with freckles, chestnut hair and perfect rose lips. Her eyes are a shining green that Alana's dress would envy. She hugs Walt tightly, who looks completely confused, his arms hanging uselessly at his sides.

'Walt?' Will says. 'Something you should tell me?'

'I... I am not sure,' the boy stammers.

Will is about to ask the girl who she is, when a tall imposing-looking man, with cheekbones so sharp they could cut glass, and dressed in the finest clothes, appears. His jacket is a deep burgundy velvet lined with midnight blue piping, a cravat to match and well-fitting beige breeches. He holds a silver goblet of something high in his hand as he approaches. The girl seems to sense him behind her and turns to the man, still keeping a hold of Walt's hand.

'This is him, Papa! This is the boy who saved me!' she says and looks back at Walt.

Chapter Notes

Here come's the Count!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Margot arrived the day after Alana, and together they took over the guest wing of the Trap Manor. The house has been filled with noise and laughter, as it always is when they visit. All the servants love Margot and Alana despite all the extra work they create. Their son Henry is at home being taken care of by the governess and nurse. That evening they are going to a dance arranged by the Count as a way of meeting all the nobles in the area. Will was dreading it and was hoping he could send Walt in the company of his Aunts, but they have all insisted he go. Winston had been tasked with finding Will's old formal clothes. He’s not worn them

since Molly passed. He'd no idea if they'd even still fit him. Luckily they had, with a good clean and press, they would do.

Alana and Margot had decided that Walt needed something new, so they had all gone into town to find a new jacket, at least for Walt. The house was quiet for the time being, and Will had taken the opportunity to have a bath and relax before the evening. He was enjoying the warmth of the water and the quiet of the house. He rarely considers his body anymore, looking down at it now in the water and wonders a great many things. The doctors had all told him that his physiology would be changed if he survived the bond sickness. Unsure as to how, though. It was rare an omega survived their alpha, so little was known about what would happen. Would he go into heat again? He hadn't since his wife's death. He was on some tonics from the doctor that they gave to omegas needing to suppress heats, they were experimental at best, but they seemed to help equal him out.

He's also considered old for an omega, especially, a now, un-bonded one. He has lines around his eyes these days, not as bright, either, as they once were. He also finds he has more aches and pains than he ever used to. His shoulder hurts when it rains, and his back groans in the morning. His hair is greying a little at the sides, too, he has noticed. He looks down at his pale legs in the water and straightens his knee, which creaks as he does. He feels old.

These days he feels more like a beta, his omega physiology not really something he considers anymore. He never really felt like a true omega anyway. He had always hated the idea of being dependent on anyone. That's why he and Molly were perfect. She never saw him that way. She just saw him as Will, the man she loved. The man who had saved her. He would always tell her she was the one that did the saving.

At times like this, when it's quiet, and he's alone, he misses her the most. She would have been so proud of the man Walt has become. The idea of him coming of age, getting married without her at his side makes his heart hurt. The remnants of their bond pangs a little. He likes to remember the times before she was ill when they would laugh and talk, play with Walt. Those were the happiest times of his life.

He hears laughter and loud voices, which can only mean one thing, that Margot and Alana are back. He sighs and gets out of the bath to get dressed. His hair is still damp when he gets downstairs and is greeted by Winston, Alana and Margot. He looks around for Walt.

'What have you done with Walt?' he says. 'Sold him for some silk?'

Alana laughs, and Margot hits his arm gently. 'No,' Margot says. 'Not sure how much we would have got for him! He met a friend, but we wanted to get back and start getting ready.'

'He won't be long,' Alana assures Will, who nods.

'We bought you a new jacket!' Margot says, a glint in her eyes. He hears Winston's sigh of relief from behind them, and he frowns.

'What is wrong with the one I've got?'

'Will,' Margot says, clutching his elbow. 'It has patches. Patches.'

'What's wrong with that? Molly always loved that jacket.'

'Dear Molly, may she rest in peace,' Alana says. 'She was a dear woman, my lovely sister, and of great standing, but her taste often left much to be desired. I mean, she did marry you, brother.'

‘Indeed,’ Will says, and they all laugh.

'Sir, I have to say, I think perhaps the old jacket is a little out of fashion,' Winston adds.

'When have I ever cared about that?' Will responds.

'Precisely, Sir,' Winston says, and the women laugh.

'Come on, let's go upstairs so you can try it on,' Margot says, linking her hand around Will's elbow leading him to the guest wing.

Once up there, he’s made to stand in front of a mirror as they try several different jackets on him. Apparently, they bought more than one. Will sighs and feels like a doll. Winston, much to his relief, appears and asks for him.

'Thank you, Winston, I appreciate the escape,' Will says, following the servant.

'Actually, Sir, I do not think you will. I thought it best to let you know before the ladies, Sir, it's young Master Walt, he’s returned somewhat worse for wear.'

'What do you mean?' Will says, quickening his pace. 'Where is he?'

'In his chambers, Sir, it seems he had a bit of a run-in with some soldiers,' Winston explains. Will quickens his pace to get to Walt's room. A battalion had recently been stationed just outside the town, they weren’t due to stay long, which was a relief as there was always trouble in the taverns when they came through. Will arrives at Walt’s chamber door and eagerly opens it, finding Walt led on his couch, with what looks like a steak wrapped in a cloth over his eye.

'Walt! What happened?' Will exclaims, running over to his ward, lifting the steak to look at the boys very swollen and red eye.

'It looks worse than it is,' Walt says as he winces.

'Who did this?'

'Some soldier, I gave as good as I got, though,' Walt says with pride, and Will thinks Molly would be proud.

'What on earth happened?!'

'I saw Detective Crawford in town. He wanted to speak to me about the recent disappearances.'

'What disappearances?' Will asks.

'Apparently, a few people have gone missing, at first, they blamed it on animals, perhaps a bear or a wolf,' Walt says and Will finds that hard to believe, there has not been a bear attack in these woods for years. 'But the last one was the daughter of the landlord of the tavern, she was very popular and so they have started to investigate the possibility that a person might be responsible. Someone living in the woods.'

'Living in the woods?' Will says, he cannot imagine anyone surviving in the dense forests, and why on earth would they be attacking people? He also wonders why he hasn't heard about this, perhaps Alana is right, he needs to get out more. 'When did this happen?'

'The young lady was supposed to come back from a trip away to the city a few days ago, but she never returned. They have sent out search parties on the road into town, but there is no sign of her. Crawford was asking me to keep an eye out for anything suspicious. I sent Margot and Alana on ahead as I didn't want to alarm them, and Winston would see them home safely.'

'Well, that is something I will have to ask Crawford about. We shall see if we can help in any way. What happened after you spoke to Crawford? I assume it wasn't him who struck you?'

'By Jove, no! Anyway, I left the Crawford and made my way home. On the road out of town, I saw a young woman who was walking into town. There was a soldier on horseback who had stopped and was talking to her. At first, I thought he was just seeing if she was all right, but then she locked eyes with me, and I knew he was bothering her. I stopped, dismounted and asked her if she needed help. One thing led to another, and I decked him, but not before he got a good hit in.'

'And the girl, what happened to her?'

'A servant appeared, he'd been sent out to look for her, and he took her home. I made sure she was all right, and then I came home before the soldier came round.'

'You left him,' Will says.

'Well, yes, but I could hear the rest of cavalry coming up the road, so they would have found him. He deserved worse anyway.'

'It sounds like you had a lucky escape. Though your Aunts are going to be furious when they see your eye!'

'Zounds! The dance tonight, I forgot about that!' Walt stands up and goes to look in the mirror, removing the steak from his eye. 'Oh no! It looks really bad, Will! What am I going to do?!'

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As it turned out, there was little they could do. Once Margot and Alana had calmed down, they went to work with the make-up they had, but it was too pale for Walt's skin tone and just made him look like a ghost. Instead, he ended up with a cold steak on his eye all the way up to the moment they stepped out of the carriage at the Lecter estate. Walt had then thrown it to one of the dogs outside the Manor House, who had happily gobbled it up.

Will had not been to this house for many years. He'd been up a few times with Molly as the various families that owned it had hosted parties and balls. It was a huge property, countless rooms, a huge ballroom and a dining room. The library was the one room he loved though, whenever he was here, he'd always try to sneak off and have a look. The stables were also vast and could house up to twenty horses at once. They walked up the torch lit steps to the main entrance, where they could see many more guests arriving. The servants took their coats and did their best not to look shocked at the state of Walt.

As was the custom at these events, they were announced as they entered the ballroom. Luckily, Will thought, so many people had arrived by that point that no one really took much notice of them. Margot and Alana both dressed in vibrant colours, Margot in a striking red and Alana in pale emerald green, both looked more than at home here. As they entered, he turned to Walt, sensing the boy's nerves were as fraught as his own and did his best to give him an encouraging smile. Before they got much further in, a young girl in a pale pink dress comes running up to Walt. She has porcelain skin dappled with freckles, chestnut hair and perfect rose lips. Her eyes are a shining green that Alana's dress would envy. She hugs Walt tightly, who looks completely confused, his arms hanging uselessly at his sides.

'Walt?' Will says. 'Something you should tell me?'

'I... I am not sure,' the boy stammers.

Will is about to ask the girl who she is, when a tall imposing-looking man, with cheekbones so sharp they could cut glass, and dressed in the finest clothes, appears. His jacket is a deep burgundy velvet lined with midnight blue piping, a cravat to match and well-fitting beige breeches. He holds a silver goblet of something high in his hand as he approaches. The girl seems to sense him behind her and turns to the man, still keeping a hold of Walt's hand.

'This is him, Papa! This is the boy who saved me!' she says and looks back at Walt.

Walt looks at her, and Will can see a flicker of recognition in his eyes now. The man is looking at Walt, assessing the bruised eye. The man smiles, and Will shivers. The man's eyes are almost as red as his jacket; flecks of gold making them shimmer. He's a pedigree alpha, anyone with a sense of anything could see it, but Will, as an omega, can feel it deep inside him. Despite himself, he takes a step back.

'Abigail, please give the boy some room,' the man says in a voice loud enough to be heard over the music and the crowd, yet it doesn't sound as if he's shouting.

Alana moves a step closer to Will and whispers in his ear. 'That's him- the Count.'

Will bats her away. 'Yes, I gathered that.'

Abigail lets go of Walt's hand and stands beside the alpha Will now knows is Count Lecter.

'What is your name, young man?' the Count asks and Will feels every word as if it were sliding down his spine. The Count hasn't looked at Will yet, but somehow, Will knows that the alpha is aware of him, that the alpha is, in fact, aware of everyone in the room at the same time.

'Walt Graham, Sir,' the boy replies and bows expertly, just as Margot taught him. Will can see her smile as she beams with pride next to him.

'Ah from the neighbouring Trap Estate,' the Count says, eyes sliding to Margot. 'Yes, your Aunt has mentioned you to me. Where is your guardian?' the alpha says feigning looking around, as if he doesn't know exactly where Will is. His eyes slide to Will just as the Count says, 'Lord Graham?'

Walt turns his head and looks at Will, who is still trying to hold himself together in the presence of such a powerful alpha.

'I am Lord Graham. Everyone calls me Will,' he manages, his voice louder than he intended. The Count continues to look at Will as he speaks. The omega feels as if those red eyes manage to roam over every inch of him before finally meeting his own. He feels completely assessed and very small.

'I have heard much about you, Lord…, my apologies, Will,' the Count says, Will knows that apparent misstep over his name was entirely intentional, as if to imply impropriety on Will's part. He stands up straighter and wishes that Molly were here. She would have this alpha sized up in moments. It's been some time since Will has been in a social situation, and everything here is too much, and this alpha is crowding his senses, making it hard to think straight, and Will cannot help but come to the conclusion that it is a deliberate attempt on the Count's part. 'You are not what I was expecting.'

Will is not sure what the alpha means by that, but he decides to take offence. Count Lecter seems like the sort of alpha, and man, who makes quick judgements about people, not worrying too much about whether they might be right or wrong.

'I am surprised you were expecting anything at all,' Will responds, finding his ground now, the anger at being insulted making him stand a little taller. 'A man such as yourself giving someone like me any thought seems… unlikely,' Will says and can feel Alana's disapproving stare from beside him.

The Count laughs, throwing his head back, showing fangs. The goblet stays secure, however, not a drop spilt. Will's even more sure this alpha doesn't do anything without specific intent.

'I had heard of your wife,' the Count continues. 'I believe I met her once and her first husband. She was very hard to forget. An alpha like that is rare. I recall her husband less well. I would imagine she was much better suited to you.'

The mention of Molly's first husband makes Will bristle despite himself. There's something in the Count's tone that irks Will.

'You would have had to ask her,' Will says. 'I would agree she was a rare woman.'

'I see she has passed down her many good traits to her son,' Lecter says.

'Yes, she has. She would be proud,' Will says, putting a hand on Walt's shoulder.

The Count looks at Walt once more and holds out his hand. 'Well, young man, it seems as if I owe you a debt for saving my young ward here.'

Walt looks at the offered hand, Will can feel the boy's trepidation, and he shares it.

'I won't bite,' the Count laughs, and Walt takes the alpha's hand.

'Anyone would have done the same, Sir,' Walt says.

Will resists the urge to roll his eyes at Walt's false modesty. They all know most would have kept on going.

'Walt is like his mother, though,' Margot says, taking a step closer to the Count. 'Never one to back away from a fight.'

'I can believe that. Abigail said you were extremely brave,' the Count says, voice softer towards Walt, and the alpha inclines his head, in what, Will imagines, is a rare move of submission, which surprises Will.

'Not brave Sir, stupid perhaps,' Walt says with a smile as the Count laughs and lets go of Walt's hand.

'Come, Walt, please have a dance with me?' Abigail asks, Will thinks her smile could light up a room.

'Um… if that's alright with you, Sir?' Walt asks the Count, who smiles widely again.

'Of course, my dear boy, you two go and enjoy yourselves,' he says, and Abigail grabs Walt and leads him to the centre of the ballroom to join in the dancing. The Count turns to watch them.

'They make quite the couple,' Alana whispers to Will.

'It's just a dance, Alana,' Will says. He's not sure, but he thinks the alpha hears this conversation, and Will hopes the Count doesn't think Will is planning a match. Alana and Margot might be, but Will is only concerned for Walt and his happiness. He would hate to be seen as throwing his ward to the nearest source of money. 'Walt will do as he pleases in the end.' Will adds, loud enough for the Count to hear.

'I know, I am just saying,' Alana says.

'Come, let's get a closer look,' Margot says and takes Alana's hand. 'We shall talk later, Sir,' she says to the alpha, who nods as they make their way closer to the dancing.

The alpha turns and looks at Will. He’s about to say something when a large well-dressed man appears at Lecter's side. 'Excuse me, Sir, I just wanted to say hello,' the man says.

Will notices that the Count's demeanour momentarily changes. Something like annoyance and possibly disgust flits across his face. It is quickly gone, however, replaced with a smooth smile.

'Ah Franklin, you made it,' the Count says.

'Indeed, I would not miss it for the world!' the man says and then seems to notice Will. 'Who is this young man?'

'This is Lord Graham, or Will as he prefers, of the Trap estate. His young ward Walt saved my dear Abigail from a soldier this morning,' the Count says, moving a little closer to Will.

'Ah! Well, you must be congratulated on your wards heroism! If anything had happened to the lovely Abigail, we all would be devastated,' Franklin says, and Will smiles.

'He was just in the right place at the right time,' Will says.

'Is that the young boy dancing with Mistress Abigail now?' Franklin asks.

'It is indeed,' Will says.

'We had all wondered at his black eye, but, now I know of his bravery and heroism it is most admirable,' Franklin says.

'Yes, indeed, one should perhaps not be so quick to judge, Franklin,' Lecter adds, and Will feels a swell of pride towards Walt. It is clear to Will, thought that Lecter finds this man repugnant. As far as Will can tell Franklin seems a little obsequious, but harmless. He’s not sure why Lecter is so put out by the man's presence.

'Not all of us can be as humble and open as you, my dear Count,' Franklin says, and Will can sense the physical effort it takes for Lecter not to roll his eyes.

'But we should all strive to be,’ Lecter adds.

'Indeed we should, m'Lord,' Franklin agrees.

'If you would excuse me,' Will says, he doesn’t want to be a part of this exchange for a moment longer. Franklin seems pleased to have the opportunity to be left alone with the Count. Will would feel bad but he just needs a moment to himself, to catch his breath. 'I think I should join my sister,’ he says, bowing his head and moving off before either of them can protest.

As Will approaches his sister and Margot, he can see they are deep in conversation with a man Will doesn’t recognise. He decides to take the opportunity to find some fresh air. He quickly looks for Walt on the dance floor and sees him whisking Abigail around with ease. He cannot help but smile.

He wants to go outside, but the entrance hall is filled with guests, so he decides to slip along the hallway and make his way to the library, hoping it's not locked. He knows exactly where it is, and once he's made his way down a few turns, he finds the door-thankfully unlocked. He goes inside and closes the door behind him. He breathes in a deep breath and lets the relief of being alone flood him. He loosens his cravat and undoes his jacket. Will leans against the door and closes his eyes for a moment until his breathing becomes more regular. Once he feels more relaxed, he walks along the shelves running an idle hand along the spines of the books before making his way to the large window. He looks out at night. The only light in the room is from the fire which has been lit. He can see the lawn of the estate stretching out in the darkness. He presses his forehead against the cold of the glass.

He thinks back to when he was here with Molly. It was a night such as this. Walt was young and stayed at home. He had sulked and clung to his mother's skirts before they finally persuaded him to go to bed. Winston promised hot cocoa and a story with all the voices. That was the bargain. Tonight that little boy is almost a man, and Will can scarcely believe it. He thinks back to the conversation he and Walt had the other evening. If Walt marries, what will he do? He cannot imagine hanging around the estate while Walt begins his married life, but he also cannot imagine sleeping anywhere that Molly had not slept with him.

He hears a creaking noise from behind and turns to see the Count has entered the room. Will immediately tightens his cravat.

'My apologies Sir,' Will begins, but the Count puts up a hand to stop him.

'No need, Will, I understand the need to escape,' the Count says, and Will thinks of Franklin moments earlier. 'Please call me Hannibal. I take it you have been to the house before? Not everyone would know this room is here,' Lecter says and joins Will by the window.

'Yes,' Will says. This close, he can smell sandalwood, and what reminds him of cracked leather, the alpha certainly has an unusual scent. 'I came here many years ago with Molly.'

'I am sorry to hear of her passing. It must be hard,' Hannibal says. He looks at the alpha and can see no trace of pity on his face which is unusual. Most people pitied him after Molly died, which only made him angry. 'You have done a wonderful job with Walt. He is an honourable boy.'

Will smiles and runs a hand through his hair. 'I feel as if he raised himself. He is his mother's son. I fear I had little to do with the man he has become.'

Hannibal shakes his head, and Will gets a strong waft of sandalwood. 'I do not believe that for a moment. The boy dotes on you, that is clear. I wanted to clarify, what I said earlier, I was worried you had taken offence.'

Will looks at Hannibal, confused. 'Offence?'

'When I said you were not what I expected,' Hannibal says, and Will nods. 'I only meant that I had expected you to be more of an….'

'Omega?' Will supplies.

'Yes, if I am honest. I have not met many older widowed omegas. Most do not survive the death of a partner. You are strong to have done so,' Hannibal says and looks at Will. Their eyes meet, and Will finds it hard to catch his breath. 'I am impressed with you.'

Will laughs. 'Ah, you thought I might be a bit more broken!' he says, wondering what on earth Alana and Margot have said about him. 'My sister can be… dramatic when she wants to be. Walt and I are doing fine despite our circumstances. His mother ensured he would be cared for, he has prospects, he will be starting an internship when he comes of age, and I am looking after Trap Manor for him for as long as he needs.'

'What about you?' Hannibal asks. Will's surprised by the question, unsure what the alpha means.

'What about me?' Will asks.

'Would you ever re-marry?'

Will is taken aback. The thought never entered his mind. 'I doubt anyone would take me.'

'Why would you think that?'

'I am pre-bonded with a ward and older than most who marry.'

'Not all,' Hannibal says and Will is once again taken aback, unsure what the Count means by that.

'What about you?' Will says, keen to change the subject away from himself. 'If you do not mind me asking. Alana said you never married?'

'Never met the right person. Now I have a ward who takes up most of my time. I suppose it is easier for alphas to marry later in life.' Will thinks the alpha sounds different now. His voice is low and his eyes dark. Less of the show he saw earlier.

'Yes, omegas of my age are not really sought after,' Will says with a wry smile. 'Much like you, I tend to focus my time on my ward. He is all I have left of Molly, and he is the most precious thing in the world to me.'

'I feel the same of Abigail. I am much in debt to Walt. If anything had happened to her today, I am not sure what I would have done.'

The door opens again, and a servant appears. 'My lord, you are needed.'

'Yes, coming, Jimmy,' Hannibal says, and the servant quietly leaves. Hannibal turns to Will and smiles. 'Duty calls. Feel free to stay here as long as you need. No one will disturb you; I shall see to it.' Before Will can say anything, the alpha is off, stalking across the room and out the door.

Chapter End Notes

kudos are Margot and Alana's brightly coloured dresses and comments are Hannibal's breeches!

Gone Fishing

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is preoccupied. A feeling he is not used to. Everything in his life is carefully ordered and arranged. He's always many steps ahead and has never been known to ponder the "what if's" of life. If he wants something, he takes it. So this feeling as he lies here in the dark, unable to sleep, staring up at the canopy of his bed while Will Graham's face floats in front of his mind eye is most baffling. He never finds anyone intriguing. Most people he meets are as predictable as the rain on a winters day. He had heard of Will Graham before meeting him and had made a certain assumption, all of which, as it turned out, was wrong. Something else he is not used to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stands in the empty entrance hall of the house. It's eerily quiet now that Margot and Alana have both left. They had to get back to Henry, their son, and so returned to the city. The ladies were pleased with the events of the ball and Walt and Abigail's blossoming friendship. They have been writing to Will and asking for updates, of which there is little to tell as far as he is concerned. It has been a few weeks since the ball, and everything in Trap Manor has returned, mostly, to normal. However, with all the recent disappearances of local people, Will would like to know a little more about how Walt spends his days. They found the body of the tavern owners daughter and another young boy in the area. The deaths couldn't be explained fully, with the official cause of death being given as an animal attack. Will does not believe this for a second. There have been no sightings of bear or wolf in the area. Something else or someone has been taking them.

Will's mind is now mostly on where his young ward might be. He was hoping this evening to catch Walt for dinner so he could find out what has been keeping the boy so busy. The young man has hardly been home this past week, out riding, or off somewhere all day. It is his last summer before he comes of age and goes into the city, so Will assumes he is off enjoying himself with friends.

'Winston!' Will calls, his voice echoing off the walls. Where is everyone? He thinks. 'Winston!' Will calls again.

The butler appears from the servants' door just by the stairs. Will is always impressed at how completely calm the man looks, no matter what might be happening downstairs.

'Sir,' Winston says.

'Where is Walt?' Will asks. 'I would like us to have dinner together this evening as I have not seen him for days.'

'I believe he and Mistress Abigail have gone fishing,' Winston says, not managing to contain the smirk on his face. Will rolls his eyes.

'Fishing?' Will says. 'Since when has Walt even gone fishing?' Will has been trying to get Walt to go fishing for years but was always refused.

'Since young Mistress Abigail expressed an interest,' Winston replies.

'Where did they go?' Will asks.

'I believe just to the pond on the edge of Wolf Estate. They meet there, as it's in the middle,' Winston says, his voice purposefully even.

'I see,' Will says, running a hand through his hair. So that's where his ward has been. Perhaps this friendship between them is more serious, even more reason to catch up with Walt this evening, Will thinks. 'Could you, perhaps, send someone down there and tell him he needs to return by five o'clock? His guardian would like to actually set eyes on him.'

'Of course, Sir,' Winston replies. 'Will there be anything else?'

'Could you ask Cook to make Walt's favourite tonight in the hope we can lure him back?'

'Good idea Sir, I will see to it directly,' Winston says and bows, which Will hates and causes him to roll his eyes again.

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Walt is stretched out on his back, feeling the sun on his skin as he lies on the warm wood off the dock. Abigail is reading to him from a book she took from her guardian's library. He's only half-listening, dozing and letting her soft voice wash over him. The fishing paraphernalia sits, untouched, in a pile to his left. The horses are munching on the grass under the shade of a nearby oak tree. Other than Abigail's soft voice and the slow mastication of the horses, the only sounds on the air are birdsong and the river's babbling. A perfect summer day, blue sky with a few wispy clouds flitting by and warm comforting sunshine.

Walt knows soon he will be in the city, surrounded by people, carriages and buildings. Bustle and constant noise. He will be busy and rarely idle as he is now. Part of him looks forward to the change, the feeling of his life beginning, the opportunity to make his own way in the world. However, he also knows that he will miss this place, his home, the place where his mother's memory inhabits every stone, blade of grass and tree. The pull of her will always be with him, he knows. He also worries for Will. His guardian, his father, as he thinks of him, will be alone in this big place with not much but his own worry to keep him company. Of course, Will assures him that there will be plenty to keep him busy, and he needs to focus on

his future. It makes Walt sad the way Will talks, as if there is no future for him. He supposes, in many ways, there isn't, but that just seems so unfair after everything Will has done for him.

He realises the soft lull of Abigail's voice has ceased, so he turns to look at her. She's frowning.

'Are you listening to me?' she says.

He smiles, sits up, laughs, and runs a hand through his hair. 'Yes, of course, I was.'

'What was happening in the story then?' she says, doing her best to seem annoyed, but he knows she isn't really.

'Something about a woman who has lost a horse?' Walt offers.

Abigail leans over and playfully hits Walt with the book. 'No! Her dog, she has lost her dog, and she has just met the man who is going to help her find it.'

'And true love, of course,' Walt says, laughing.

'Well, yes, what is the point of any story if there isn't love in it?'

Walt rolls his eyes. 'There are many stories that don't have love in them and are perfectly fine as they are.'

'Name one,' she says.

'Arthurian legends, for one, all the battles and tales of bravery,' Walt says, even though he knows that, of course, those books are filled with love, romance and marriages.

'Oh, don't be ridiculous!'

'Well, perhaps not, but the best bits are the battles,' Walt says. He stands up and stretches his arms out.

'Not true, and you know it. Plus, what would all those battles be for, if not for love?'

He smiles and looks at her. The book now rests in her lap. She is holding a lace parasol which she is twirling. Her light blue dress catches the light, so she looks like a shimmering nymph.

'What about you, Abigail Hobbs? Do you have a great love story? Is there a battle being fought for your hand?'

She laughs. 'Chance would be a fine thing,' she says. 'I think I prefer to read about it rather than live it.'

'On that, we can agree,' Walt replies. He leans down and picks up a few flat pebbles, and begins to skim them across the water.

He sees Abigail stand out of the corner of his eye, dust off her dress, and stands next to him. She leaves the book on the dock next to the fishing rods. She watches as he skims stones. He hands her one to try.

'It's all in the wrist,' he says.

She throws one, and it skims three times before dropping down into the water. She looks at him, and he nods his approval.

'What am I going to do when you leave? I am going to be so bored! Can't you stay?' she says for the hundredth time. Walt rolls his eyes again. Every time they meet, it's the same.

'You know I can't. I need to go and make my way in the world. Make some money to help Will with Trap Manor.'

'We could just get married now,' she says, looking up at him through her eyelashes.

Walt sighs and skims another stone. He wishes it were that simple. He wants to make his way in the world, secure his mother's legacy. If he marries Abigail, then he will lose his name, the Manor and any chance of being independently wealthy. The Count's riches are so vast he cannot compete with them. He wishes it didn't matter to him, as much as his mother and Will always said he should marry for love, he doesn't want to lose who he is. He knows Will and his mother married for love, and they were so happy. He wants that. He also knows Abigail wants that too. He also wants to be someone she would be proud to marry, not someone people would gossip and question, assume he is only marrying her for her money.

'I am not good enough for you, not yet, he says.

'You know none of that matters to me,' she says, placing a hand on his shoulder.

'I don't think it works like that,' Walt says. 'You will find someone. The Count will make sure of it. Some dashing noble will arrive and sweep you off your feet, and you won't even remember me!'

She gently hits him on the arm. 'No! I would never forget you! You are the only friend I have. I want to be with you. I've never felt like this about anyone.' He smiles and nods as he feels exactly the same. 'You are the one who will forget me, you'll go to the city and all those dances and meet all the beautiful omegas and alphas, and you won't remember me at all!'

He thinks about this, again, for the hundredth time. The problem with being a beta is that he needs to declare some kind of preference, and he honestly has no idea what his is. He had no idea until he met Abigail. She changed everything. He wants to be with her, but he also wants to be worthy of her. He wishes his feelings for Abigail would be enough. It would be easier.

'Not possible. We shall always be friends. You will come to the city anyway, and we can go to those dances together.'

'I don't think it will be the same, though,' she says and sighs.

'Perhaps not, but can't we just enjoy the summer together?' he says and puts an arm around her.

'Yes, we can,' she says. Abigail moves away from Walt sits back down where she was. She doesn't pick the book back up, though. She runs a finger down the leather spine.

'Do you think about it, though? Getting married?' she asks.

Walt skims one more stone and turns to look at her. 'Yes, I do. Of course, I think about it all the time. I wonder what my…' his voice trails off, and he looks out over the pond as the sunlight catches ripples on the surface.

'Your Mother, what she would think,' Abigail says. 'I feel the same way. I miss my parents every day. I love Hannibal, and I am so thankful for everything he has done, but I sometimes wish I had a mother to talk to.'

'Do you remember them? Your parents?'

'Flashes, sometimes, my father more than my Mother.'

'I remember my mother's voice more than anything, her reading me stories at night. It's funny isn't how people just assume that after time, and because you are older and not crying all the time that you are whole again, that everything is fine.'

'I still cry,' Abigail admits.

Walt looks at her and then moves over to sit next to her. She's never mentioned this before. 'You do?'

'I still dream about that night, the night they died.'

'I thought you didn't remember anything,' Walt says softly. She's never talked about the night of her parent's death.

'I don't, not really. When I sleep, sometimes I have these nightmares, and then when I wake up. I can't remember anything except… except the terror.'

'Does the Count know?'

She nods. 'Yes, I used to have to sleep in his bed. It was so bad. It's less now, and I have found since being your friend even less.'

'Well, I am glad, I feel the same,' he says.

'About what?'

'I feel like I can talk to you about things I can't with anyone else. You understand what it's like, how it feels without even having to explain,' Walt says. He has felt a connection with Abigail since the dance.

'Orphans support, I guess,' she says with a smile.

'Yes, probably,' Walt agrees. He hears what sounds like a horse approaching, so he stands up to look.

'Who is it?' Abigail asks. They are not technically doing anything wrong. It's just that Walt hasn't told Will about these meetings, and he is pretty sure Abigail has not told the Count. They just wanted to be left alone. Walt didn't want the Count thinking he is courting Abigail for her money.

Walt looks out at the approaching rider. 'Looks like Peter,' he says. 'He's the stablehand at Trap.'

'Do you want me to hide or something?' Abigail says.

Walt turns and looks at her. He laughs. 'No, it's fine. Let's just see what he wants.'

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'You know you don't have to hide,' Will says as they tuck into Walt's favourite meal of game pie.

'What do you mean?' Walt says between mouthfuls.

Will sighs and takes a sip of his wine. 'Mistress Hobbs, I don't mind that you have been spending time with her. Does the Count mind? Is that why you have been so secretive?' Will had worried that perhaps the Count decided Walt was not good enough for his ward, a thought that had made him unexpectedly angry. Now he finally has Walt's attention. He intends to get to the bottom of whatever is going on beyond his ward and Abigail Hobbs.

'I am not sure if he knows,' Walt says.

'What do you mean?' Will says and is even more worried now.

'I don't think she has told him we are friends,' Walt says and shoves some more pie in his mouth.

Will frowns because he needs to improve Walt's table manners before the boy leaves for London.

'Chew, Walt, please!' Will says, and Walt puts his hand up in apology and slows down the consumption of his dinner. 'Why hasn't she told him? What's the problem?' If Abigail is lying to the Count about her relationship with Walt, this could end badly for everyone.

'We just didn't think it was anyone's business. The only reason I didn't tell you was that I didn't want Alana and Margot to find out. The thing is, we are just friends.'

'You know you can trust me, Walt. If you didn't want Alana and Margot to know, then I wouldn't have told them,' Will says, a little hurt.

'I know, and I am sorry. I can see now that I have made it seem more of a big deal by hiding it. Honestly, we are just friends, nothing more, no marriage, I'm afraid.'

Will sighs and puts his cutlery down. He leans forward. 'Walt, you know that doesn't bother me. I just want you to be happy. If you said you wanted to marry Abigail, that would be fine, but if not, that's also all right. I know we haven't talked about your…preferences, and we don't have to not if you don't want to, but I am here if you need to talk.'

Walt stops eating and meets Will's eyes. 'I know that, and I am sorry if I made out like I can't talk to you, but with Abigail, we just understand each other, we know what it's like to lose… to lose a parent.'

Of course, Will thinks, that's what this is about. 'I understand that, Walt, and it makes sense you would feel a connection to her, and it's good you have someone who understands in a way that I couldn't.'

'You lost her too,' Walt says. 'I know that, but she was my mother.'

'I know Walt, and I know we all sometimes forget how that still affects you,' Will says. As Walt grows older and more accomplished, it is easy to forget that he's still a boy who lost his mother all too soon. 'You are doing so well. I think we just assume you are fine all the time. I know that can't be true. Especially now, as you begin the new phase of your life, you must miss her terribly. I know I do.'

'Yes,' Walt says and starts eating again. 'I know she would have something to say about all of this, my friendship with Abigail, and going to the city.'

'She would!' Will says he knows she would have a lot to say about it. 'She would also be immensely proud of the man you have become.'

Walt stops eating for a moment and then looks up at Will.

'Thank you,' Walt says. 'I think she would be proud of both of us.'

Will is taken aback by that last comment. 'Well, perhaps.'

They continue to eat in silence for a while before Walt speaks again. 'About my preferences, I guess, right now, I'm not sure. I feel as if I will know when I meet the right person. Does that make sense?'

Will nods and drinks some wine. 'Yes, absolutely, I felt much the same. I had little interest in anyone before I met your mother, and I think it was not so much the biology that attracted, as the person.'

'Is that common? To feel that way? I thought most people knew what they wanted?'

Will shakes his head and is so glad he brought this up because he can see how it has weighed heavy on Walt's mind. 'Yes, of course! The lucky ones are the ones who know. Many people are not sure until they meet someone, or they don't meet anyone at all. Attraction and love can be complicated and not always felt for the same person. You can be attracted to someone and not love them. You can love someone and not feel attracted to them. Love is hard to pin down. Love can mean a great many things.'

Walt is silent for a moment and then looks at Will. 'I care about her a lot, Abigail. I can see a future with her, but I also don't want to be seen as less than her, that she could get a better match. I want to be worthy of her. If we were to… marry.'

Will almost chokes on his food. 'So you've talked about it with her?'

'A little, and she says she would wait for me, but I think the Count has probably many matches for her that are better than me.'

'Is that how you feel? As if you are not good enough for her?'

'Yes, but only because I want to marry for love, not money or standing. I don't want her to lose standing because of me. She deserves more. Maybe if everything goes to plan in the city, I can make enough money and form a reputation that would mean I am worthy of her.'

Will sighs. 'That's a lot of pressure to put on yourself, Walt. Is that how she feels? As if you are not good enough for her? Is that how the Count feels?'

'No, she wants to get married, and she thinks the Count would approve, and I know I shouldn't care what others think, but it's not just about that.'

Will had thought this was about more. 'Your name, your mother's name, Trap Manor.'

'Yes, I want to keep her legacy alive.'

'Walt, you can decide who you want to marry whenever you choose. There is no pressure from me. I will always be here for you no matter what.'

'I know that, and I thank you for it,' Walt says. There is silence between them, but Will can tell there is something else bothering Walt.

'Is there something else wrong?' Will asks.

Walt sighs. 'I guess I'm just worried.'

'About what?'

'About what is going to happen to the Manor, to you, when I've left for the city. Maybe I should just marry Abigail. If the Count approved, you can't deny it would solve a lot of our problems.'

Will puts his cutlery down, picks up his glass of wine and leans back in his chair.

'Walt,' he says as he takes a large sip from the glass. 'You do not need to worry about Trap Manor or me. All you need to worry about is doing whatever makes you happy. I do not believe you would be happy getting married right now. If you feel you need to carve out more of a name for yourself, and I do believe you are more than capable of doing so, then that is what you must do. I can take care of everything here for you until you decide what you want to do. As for me, I am fine. There is more than enough here to keep me busy. Plus, your Aunts are never far away, and I hope that you, too, will return when you can to see me.'

'Of course, I will!' Walt says. 'I just hate the thought of you being lonely.'

'Being your guardian has been a privilege, Walt and I would not change it for the world. I have all I need right here. You do not need to worry about me being lonely.' Will says, but part of him is still a little nervous about Walt leaving. He is sure every parent goes through this. As he has just said to Walt, there is more than enough going on around the Trap Estate to keep him occupied.

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Hannibal is preoccupied. A feeling he is not used to. Everything in his life is carefully ordered and arranged. He's always many steps ahead and has never been known to ponder the "what if's" of life. If he wants something, he takes it. So this feeling as he lies here in the dark, unable to sleep, staring up at the canopy of his bed while Will Graham's face floats in front of his mind eye is most baffling. He never finds anyone intriguing. Most people he meets are as predictable as the rain on a winters day. He had heard of Will Graham before meeting him and had made a certain assumption, all of which, as it turned out, was wrong. Something else he is not used to.

He had expected someone, weaker, perhaps, not weaker, but certainly more omegan. He had assumed that Lord Graham would have been forcing his ward on Abigail and possibly himself on Hannibal as a future meal ticket. Instead, Will had shied away from everyone at the ball and seemed non-plussed about Abigail dancing with Walt all evening. The fact that they have been sneaking away to spend the days together, of course, he knows, he allows Abigail this indulgence because the boy seems so honourable. The boy saved her from that soldier and never asked for anything in return. Walt has dismissed Abigail's advances, seemingly because the boy wants to make his way. Will Graham is fine with this.

He thinks back to the brief moment they shared in the library. Hannibal had purposefully followed Lord Graham in there, intrigued as to where the man was going. His scent too, so faint, almost not there at all, almost like a beta. If it weren't for the faint glimmer in those blue eyes, the omega could pass for one. When Hannibal had stood close to Lord Graham, without the olfactory distraction of the ballroom full of people, he had caught a slight whiff of the omega, and he had been intrigued. Now his mind seems to be preoccupied with Lord Graham. Far too much for his liking. He does not need complications, not when he is so close to finding his quarry.

Chapter End Notes

comments are each twirl of Abigail's parasol and kudos are Hannibal's sighs of frustration

The Missing Solider

Chapter Summary

These past few days he has been caught up in his own thoughts too much, worrying about Walt but also a little preoccupied after that encounter with the Count in the library. The alpha had been on his mind, he wasn't even sure why, perhaps it was just because of the burgeoning friendship between Walt and Abigail. He was worried that the Count might not approve, even though Will knows that Walt would make a fine match for anyone, but Abigail was an alpha and the Count's only ward. There was something else though, most nights as he fell asleep the memory of the alpha's eyes would wander through his mind. The almost red colour of them. The way Will had felt when he first saw the Count, the way his body had reacted as if it has just remembered after so many years that it was an omega. He hadn't felt like an omega for much of his life, let alone since Molly passed, but there had been something that night that had stirred within him. He shakes his head and spurs the mare on, hoping to chase away some of these thoughts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will is restless. He has been for a few days, unsure as to why. Something just feels off. He decides that a ride into town might be just what he needs. He makes his way to the stables, where Peter is looking after the horses with his usual care. The gentle stablehand helps Will saddle up the grey mare he always uses, a steadfast horse and fast. Once ready, Will makes his way out into the summer sunshine and decides to take the longer route into town so that he can gallop through some fields, hoping he might burn off some steam.

It is a beautiful day, the sun is shining, and the air is warm. Perfect for a ride. He assumes Walt is off with Abigail somewhere as he hadn't seen the boy since their dinner last night. Will is used to being alone now, and in all honestly, it doesn't bother him. He's more at peace with his own company. He gallops through the fields of tall grass and wildflowers, wind in his hair, beads of sweat beginning to form on his forehead and he cannot help but grin.

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colour of them. The way Will had felt when he first saw the Count, the way his body had reacted as if it has just remembered after so many years that it was an omega. He hadn't felt like an omega for much of his life, let alone since Molly passed, but there had been something that night that had stirred within him. He shakes his head and spurs the mare on, hoping to chase away some of these thoughts.

Once through the fields, he makes his way to the tannery intending to pick up the new leather satchel he ordered for Walt for his birthday. He ties his horse up next to the trough.

'Ah, Lord Graham,' a voice from behind him booms. A voice he could never fail to recognise. He turns and smiles.

'Detective Crawford,' Will replies. 'How are you on this fine day?'

Jack laughs and claps Will hard on the shoulder. 'Well, thank you. I have been meaning to talk to you; I am glad I ran into you.'

'You have?' Will says, intrigued. 'To what do I owe the pleasure?'

Jack laughs again. 'I actually wanted to speak to Walt.'

'Walt?' Will says, his back up now, the idea that Crawford would want to speak to Walt concerning, to say the least, after all the trouble with the soldier.

'I just wanted to clarify a few things about that incident a few weeks ago with the Lecter girl and him.'

The morning after the ball, Will had sent a message to Crawford informing the Detective of what had happened. Will was worried Walt might get into trouble, so it seemed best to head it off. Jack had been a long time friend of Molly's, so Will knew Jack would likely give Walt the benefit of the doubt, but it still seemed smart to get ahead of things. Jack had come by and taken Walt's statement. There had been no complaints from any of the soldiers, probably too embarrassed, having been taken down by a local boy. The Lecter's had filed no complaint, so there was nothing else to do as far as Jack was concerned. Will had been relieved, but he can feel something is not right, and it's making him worry.

'Why?' Will asks. 'Has something else come up?'

'Well, it's strange, as I said at the time, there have been no complaints filed, but what is strange is what happened last week.'

'Last week?'

'Yes, the soldier in question, the man who had the altercation with Walt, disappeared on their way out of town,' Crawford says, looking at Will with an inscrutable expression.

A cold feeling slithers down Will's spine. 'What do you mean disappeared?'

'They were supposed to leave with the rest of the cavalry, but when they called the morning rote, he was nowhere to be seen. It may be that he deserted, but no one can find him.'

‘Do you think it's connected to the recent murders?’

‘Perhaps, I wanted to check a few details with Walt as he may have been one of the last people to have seen him.’

‘I can ask him to come by the station,’ Will says.

‘That would be great. Have you noticed anything strange out near you? We think maybe something is in the woods there.’

‘In the woods?’

‘The road out of town passes by some dense woodland on the border between yours and the Wolf Estate. I have spoken to the Count as well, asked him to keep an ear out. Perhaps you could too and the servants?’

‘Of course,’ Will says. ‘I haven’t noticed anything. What do you think it is?’

‘Could be a drifter, a few maybe. It could be a wolf or bear. It might be that the soldier and the other murders aren’t connected, but we have to cover every possibility. We are telling people not to go to the woods and to not travel alone, especially at night. We are increasing patrols in the area. I am sure we will get to the bottom of it.’

‘I will relay the message to the servants and get Walt to come by,’ Will says.

‘Where is young Master Walt? I have not seen him around as much these days.’

‘He is around, spending time with friends and enjoying the country air before he leaves for the city in a few months,’ Will says, purposefully not mentioning that Walt has been spending time with Abigail. He made a promise to Walt to keep it to himself and he intends to keep it.

‘Ah yes, of course! Tell him to be careful out there, I know he can take care of himself, but if anything were to happen to him… well, I know Molly would never forgive me for not keeping a close eye on you two. You must come for dinner before he leaves. I know Bella would love to see him.’

‘That would be lovely, and I’ll be sure to tell him. Actually, I am on my way to pick up a present for him.’

‘Well, I won’t keep you. Tell Walt to come by in the next few days.’

‘Will do.’

Jack leaves him to it, waving a hand as the Detective goes. Will takes in the information Jack has just given him with some interest. He had not left the estate in the last few days, busy catching up with correspondence, and he had not been feeling well. The idea that someone or someones could be in the woods picking people off is unsettling. The woods are vast on the border between the estates, they are dense, and people can easily get lost or hide in them.

There has never been anything like this before in the area that he can remember anyway. He hopes Crawford gets to the bottom of this soon. If anyone can, it would be the Detective.

Will collects the satchel for Walt and secures the package to the saddle of his horse before making his way out of town. He decides to go back via the pond to see if Abigail and Walt are there. He should warn them of what Crawford has just told him. He stops in one of the nearby paddocks where there is a stream and lets his horse take a drink. He is so deep in thought, enjoying the cool shade and breeze he jumps out of his skin when the Count appears on a large black stallion.

'My apologies, I didn't mean to startle you,' the Count says. His horse walks up next to Will and his own, and the Count extends the reigns so his horse can drink the water.

'I was miles away,' Will says and really thinks he should have been paying more attention especially considering what Crawford just told him. He looks at the Count and cannot help but feel a slight flush come across his cheeks. The man is looking every inch the thoroughbred alpha, even with riding, his hair is still perfectly in place, clothes immaculate, boots shined to a mirror gleam. 'Should have been paying more attention.'

'It is a beautiful day, easy to daydream,' the Count says.

'It is indeed,' Will says. He feels oddly nervous, much as he did that night in the library, he's not usually affected by alpha's, but the Count is not just any alpha. That feeling is there again, something moving and stirring inside him, strange and disconcerting but not altogether unpleasant.

'Which way are you headed?' the Count asks. The alpha's eyes look red in this light, and Will cannot hold their gaze for long.

'Back to the estate,' Will says as his horse lifts its head. He shortens the reins. 'I had some business in town.'

'I, too, am heading back. Would you mind some company?' the Count says.

'Actually, I was going to go via the pond to see if Walt might be there,' Will says. He doesn't want to mention Abigail as he is still unsure if the Count knows about Abigails and Walt's little assignations.

The Count smiles, and leans his head back, and laughs. 'Ah yes! Those two have their little meetings, don't they.'

'You know?' Will says, surprised that the Count is so relaxed about it.

'Of course, Abigail thinks she can get away with these things under my nose, but I keep a much closer eye on her than she thinks,' the Count says and looks at Will, eyes narrowing. 'What made you want to check on them?'

'I bumped into Detective Crawford, and he had some concerns about the woods that border our estates. He thinks someone or someones might be abducting people there. With the

soldier having gone missing,' Will says and notices a slight flicker of something in the Count's eyes.

'Soldier?' the Count asks.

'Yes, from the cavalry, it is the one who bothered Abigail the day before the ball.'

'Ah yes, the Detective mentioned it to me, the one that Master Walt saved my girl from.'

Will nods. 'Apparently, he didn't make morning roll call at the camp and hasn't been seen for a few days.'

'That is strange,' the Count says.

'I just wanted to tell both Abigail and Walt to take care,' Will says.

'I do feel better knowing she is with Walt, but, I must confess,' the Count leans closer to Will, 'they are not alone. I have a man discreetly follow them.'

Will laughs. 'You do?'

'Please do not tell them, Abigail would kill me!'

Will smiles and draws a finger across his lips. 'Your secret is safe with me. Honestly, it makes me feel a little better.'

'The day Master Walt saved her, she had spotted the man I had following her and slipped him, but I have since replaced him with someone much better.'

Will laughs again. 'The things we do for our wards. Well, I suppose I can leave them to it, as you have them safely looked after.'

'Indeed,' the Count laughs. 'But please feel free to check on them.'

'No, I think I can speak to Walt later; let's leave them to it,' Will agrees.

'Shall we?' the Count says, manoeuvring his horse to face the other way.

'I was going to ride a little hard,' Will says, hoping the Count will get the hint that he wants to be left alone.

'Race?' the Count says.

'Race?' Will says incredulously. The way the alpha is looking at him right now is making him blush and he is not sure he likes it. 'Count Lecter, are you serious?'

'Please call me Hannibal, and yes, I am. Let's race to the border of the woods,' the alpha smiles and Will cannot help but mirror it.

'Sure,' he says, and before he knows it, Hannibal is off at full gallop.

Will swears under his breath and spurs his horse on to follow. He has not ridden this fast for a very long time, even on his way into town. Following Hannibal clears his mind of everything else and all he wants to do is catch up and wipe that smirk of a smile off the alpha's face. They ride through the three remaining paddocks to the boundary of the wood. Will is about to pass Hannibal when his horse trips on something and the next thing he knows he is flying through the air hurtling towards the ground.

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Will wakes up to pain. He groans and winces as the discomfort comes into focus, his leg, his leg is definitely broken. He opens his eyes and looks up to meet red iris's looking down at him. He can feel a soft mattress beneath him and a heavy blanket on top of him.

'You are awake, good,' a voice that appears to be Hannibal's says to him.

Will meets those red eyes fully and he realises Hannibal is sat in a chair next to him. He looks around the room and realises he has no idea where he is. 'Where am I? What happened?'

Hannibal smiles and rises from his chair. He puts the back of his hand against Will's forehead briefly. 'Good, no fever. You are in my chambers, you fell from your horse. I brought you back and set your leg.'

Will looks down and can see his leg is propped up under the blankets and he groans.

'How did you…?'

'I carried you on my horse,' Hannibal says and Will tries not to think about the fact that Hannibal could so easily lift him and carry him back here. The thought of being carried by the alpha to the man's own bed makes that feeling stir even stronger. He closes his eyes for a moment, willing it to go away. Hannibal continues speaking so Will opens his eyes again. 'I sent someone back for your mare, she's fine, she slipped a shoe but your stable hand Peter has come by and she will be fine. I have also informed Walt that you are both welcome to stay for as long as you need.'

Will still feels fuzzy, and he is not sure he understands everything Hannibal is saying.

'Did you say I am in your chambers?'

Hannibal smiles and nods. 'Yes, it was closest, and the bed was all ready-made, I wanted you to be comfortable. I am a surgeon, so I am more than capable of fixing the leg. You will need to rest for the next few days, stay off it completely while it has a chance to heal.'

'Oh, god, I can't stay here, that would be too much, I am sure I can get Winston to come and get me,' Will says but is stopped by Hannibal, who holds his hand up.

'No, you will stay here and rest, my orders. I have sent for your valet Winston. He will be here within the hour with anything you and Walt may need. He will stay on and help you as much as you need. I insist you stay under my care. After all this is my fault.' Will shakes his

head, but Hannibal silences him. ‘Rest, close your eyes, get some sleep. I shall let Walt know you are all right. I shall check on you in an hour. Rest.’

Will wants to argue, but the pull of unconsciousness is too much, and he closes his eyes, allowing himself to be lulled into a deep sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos are the beads of sweat on Will's forehead and comments are Hannibal's perfectly polished riding boots.

A Bedtime Story

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal begins to read, and his voice is lilting and soft. Every word washes over Will and soothes him. To be cared for, like this, is unusual for Will. Only Winston, when Will was going through his bond sickness, took care of him, and even then, that was out of duty. Hannibal is here, reading to him, making sure he is alright, and it's a strange, but not unwelcome, feeling to be the one taken care of. Will had nursed Molly through her illness and death. He has nursed Walt through childhood illnesses, always taking care of others. His own childhood had been brief, growing up fast. To lie here with nowhere to be, nothing to be getting on with, just listening to Hannibal read to him is, oddly, the most relaxed he has felt in years.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wakes up to fading light filtering through a gap in the thick damask curtains. There is a breeze coming through the open window. His eyes take a moment to adjust to his surroundings and remember where he is. He groans and brings a hand to his forehead. He had hoped it was just a bad dream, falling off his horse, waking up in the Count's bedroom, but looking around him at the richly decorated room with his leg propped up in a bed that is not his own, he realises that it's all true. It must be early evening by now, judging by the waning light outside. He looks to the small table on the side with a jug of water and glass set next to it. His throat is parched, and he reaches for the jug. He just about manages to pick it up, but then the angle he's in causes his leg to move and pain to shoot up his calf and knee. He shouts out and, in shock, drops the jug, helpless as it smashes and spills water all over the floor.

As he tries to reach down, the door opens.

'Will, stop, don't move, are you alright?' the Count has appeared by his bedside, strong arms wrap themselves around Will's torso and re-right him to a sitting position, adjusting the feather-soft pillows behind him.

'I am so sorry, I broke the jug,' Will says

Hannibal starts to look Will over, hands, checking his splinted leg, with a deft and sure touch that Will finds oddly comforting.

‘That doesn’t matter, are you alright? Did you hurt yourself further?’ the Count asks.

‘No, no, just clumsy,’ Will says and runs a hand through his hair.

‘Let me get you some water,’ the Count says, and before Will can say anything further, the alpha is off out of the room. A moment later, a servant appears and starts to clear up the broken pieces of glass and dry the water. Will frowns and apologies once more. Hannibal appears with a new jug as the servant leaves. The Count pours some water into the glass, hands it to Will and sits on the chair next to the bed. He drinks the entire lot, and then Hannibal reaches and takes the now empty glass from him.

‘More?’ Hannibal asks, but Will shakes his head no.

‘I am sorry for all this trouble I have caused,’ Will says. He feels like an idiot. He cannot believe he has managed to break his leg.

Hannibal places the glass down on the table and resumes his seat on the chair next to the bed.

‘As I said, this was my fault. I am sorry that you got hurt,’ the Count says. ‘How is the pain? I would recommend holding off on taking more medication until a little later, after dinner, perhaps? If you can manage it? Then you should sleep through the night.’

‘The pain is fine as long as I don’t move,’ Will replies.

‘Then I recommend you stay still and allow me to take care of everything. I shall have dinner brought to you,’ Hannibal says. ‘I know Walt is keen to see you if you are feeling up to it?’

‘Yes, of course. Where is he?’

‘He came with Winston and Peter as soon as he heard. He is currently in the library, I believe, with Abigail. I will go and get him.’

‘Oh, no, leave them to it,’ Will says, feeling tired again.

‘I can see you are exhausted. Let me get dinner sent up to you, and Walt can come by, and then I think you should sleep.’

‘What about you? This is your room. I should move to another,’ Will says even though he knows he can’t.

‘Hush, you rest. There are more than enough beds in this place. Close your eyes for a moment, and I’ll send Winston up with a tray. Walt will be along shortly. All is in hand,’ Hannibal says and stands up in one swift movement making his way towards the door before stopping and looking back at Will. ‘Are you warm enough? I can have the fire lit? Extra blankets, perhaps?’

Will shakes his head. ‘I am fine, thank you, Count, really for everything.’

‘Please, call me Hannibal, and you are more than welcome,’ Hannibal says and leaves the room.

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Will is woken from a deep sleep by Winston coming in with a tray of something that smells delicious. He looks behind him for the Count, but Hannibal isn’t there. Winston places the tray on the side, lights the fire and turns on some of the lamps.

‘Sir, do you need to use the bathroom?’ Winston asks. ‘The Count is acquiring crutches, but they will not here until tomorrow, so, for now, you will need assistance. I thought perhaps it might be best if it were me?’

Will smiles and nods. ‘Yes, thank you, Winston.’

Winston helps him out of bed. They stumble across the room and through a door in the far wall that leads to a large bathroom with a separate closet that houses the water closet, a built-in bench with a hole and a hinged top where the chamber pot sits below. Winston helps Will bunch up the nightgown he is in and sits on the bench. At this moment, Will realises that he has been undressed and is now wearing an oversized nightgown that probably belongs to the Count. He also realises it was probably the Count who undressed and redressed him. How humiliating, he thinks, his body is not exactly impressive these days. Even though the man is a doctor, there are not many omega’s of Will’s age and situation.

‘This is humiliating,’ Will grumbles.

‘Sir, if you are worried about the Count, he is a surgeon. He’s seen it all,’ Winston says. ‘Now give me a shout when you are finished.’

Will groans again. This situation is getting more embarrassing by the second. Then he thinks Winston has seen him in much worse strife after Molly died. The servant has cleaned him up in many states, always loyal and kind.

‘Thank you, Winston, as always,’ Will says.

Once Will is safely back in bed, propped up with extra pillows, which seem to have been dropped off while he was in the privy, along with extra blankets, Winston sets up the tray so Will can eat. There is some kind of delicious soup, freshly baked bread, salty, rich butter and the best ham he has ever had in his life. As Will is tucking into his food, Walt appears, and Winston leaves the two to catch up.

‘Are you alright?’ Walt asks, sitting on the other side of the bed from Will, back leant against the footboard.

‘Embarrassed, but, yes fine,’ Will says, offering Walt a slice of ham which the growing boy takes eagerly.

‘No need to be embarrassed. Hannibal feels awful, by the way,’ Walt says, and Will raises an eyebrow.

‘Hannibal?’ Will says. ‘You call him by his name?’

‘Yes, he doesn’t like being referred to as The Count, prefers Hannibal apparently, like you, you hate being called Lord even by the servants,’ Walt says.

‘He knew about you and Abigail,’ Will says and smiles.

‘Yes, I figured that out,’ Walt says. ‘It’s good that he doesn’t mind.’

‘I think he is not what we thought, or at least what I thought. He seems more open-minded.’

‘More open-minded than a Count should be? Have you met many Counts?’ Walt says and laughs.

‘No, but your mother dragged me to many society events, and I know what alphas can be like, especially ones of Hannibal’s standing.’

‘You call him Hannibal too,’ Walt laughs. ‘Not the Count.’

‘Yes, I suppose you are right. We have our aversion to titles in common. Regardless I am just glad that he will not be strange about you spending time with his ward.’

‘I know, I am also relieved. Abigail, she has become someone important to me,’ Walt says, and Will cannot help but smile.

‘I am glad. Hopefully, I can get to know her a bit while we are here. Though if you don’t want to stay Walt, then please do not feel you have to.’

‘No, I think it will be fun, all of us together. He likes you as well, you know, Hannibal.’

‘I am sure he just feels sorry for me,’ Will grimaces. He has made himself look like the useless ageing omega he feels most days.

‘No, Abigail says he is rarely as open with people. He put you in his chambers, he could have put you anywhere, he could have just set your leg at Trap Manor,’ Walt points out.

‘I am sure it was just that this was the closest available room, and he felt bad as it was his idea we raced,’ Will says, but Walt is right. It was very kind of him to go out of his way.

‘Maybe,’ Walt says.

‘I am glad he likes you,’ Will says, keen to change the subject.

‘You are right. It will be good for you to get to know Abigail. I think you two will get along,’ Walt says, and Will nods.

‘How are we doing?’ Hannibal says as he opens the door. Walt goes to move off the bed but is stopped by Hannibal, who walks over to Will. ‘How is the food?’

‘Delicious, thank you,’ Will says.

‘Good, I have brought some more medication to help with the pain, and Walt, here, helped me pick out some books for you, should you get bored,’ Hannibal says and places a pile of books down in easy reach of Will on the bedside table as well as a small bottle containing some kind of liquid. ‘I won’t keep you. Walt dinner should be ready in about an hour.’

Walt gets off the bed and stands up. ‘Oh, it’s okay. I can see Will is all taken care of, and I believe Abigail wanted to get in a quick card game before dinner, so I’ll catch up with you in the morning, Will.’

With that, Walt is gone. Will looks at the door, perplexed.

‘Strange,’ Will says. He looks over at Hannibal, who is smiling.

‘Keen to get back to Abigail, I suppose,’ Hannibal says, and Will agrees. ‘Do you have everything you need? Are you still hungry?’

Will shakes his head. ‘No, no, I am fine, thank you.’

Hannibal takes the tray from Will, places it outside the room for a servant to take, then comes back in and sits down on the chair beside the bed.

‘Let me know if the books are not to your taste,’ Hannibal says, clasping his hands in front of his lap.

‘I am not sure I can concentrate enough, perhaps tomorrow,’ Will says.

‘I could always read to you,’ Hannibal says. His face is serious, and Will feels a blush creep over his cheeks.

‘Oh no, don’t let me keep you,’ Will says, unsure.

Hannibal leans forward and grabs one of the books from the pile. ‘Nonsense, as I just said, I have at least at an hour until dinner, and if Walt and Abigail are playing cards, then I find myself at a loose end. Allow me?’

Will watches as Hannibal opens a book with his slender and delicate fingers. Surgeons hands, which were deft and confident as they checked him over, lifting Will with seemingly no problem, as if he were just a young omega. He swallows, not sure where his mind is going with these thoughts.

Hannibal begins to read, and his voice is lilting and soft. Every word washes over Will and soothes him. To be cared for, like this, is unusual for Will. Only Winston, when Will was going through his bond sickness, took care of him, and even then, that was out of duty. Hannibal is here, reading to him, making sure he is alright, and it's a strange, but not unwelcome, feeling to be the one taken care of. Will had nursed Molly through her illness and death. He has nursed Walt through childhood illnesses, always taking care of others. His own childhood had been brief, growing up fast. To lie here with nowhere to be, nothing to be getting on with, just listening to Hannibal read to him is, oddly, the most relaxed he has felt in years.

He closes his eyes and lets his breathing even out. At the back of his mind, he briefly thinks he should not be this comfortable in the presence of a man he hardly knows, but yet, somewhere inside of him, he knows he can trust Hannibal. He wonders if it's the purebred alpha pheromones interacting with his omega biology. He dismisses the thought as he has hardly any of his omega senses left. He is old, broken and basically a beta. Taking a deep breath he just decides to not think about it, what is the harm in just relaxing, giving in.

Hannibal's voice continues, he only partly concentrates on the words, he knows the novel that the alpha is reading from. Walt would have chosen this one. The story as familiar as an old blanket. He would listen to Molly read this to Walt when he was young. He loses all track of time and drifts off into a peaceful sleep. His dreams filled with strange images of dark woods, creatures, and running after something. They are only on the surface though and soon he falls into peaceful darkness.

Chapter End Notes

kudos is Will's relaxed breathing and comments are Hannibal's words as they waft over Will lulling him to sleep.

Wolf Lake

Chapter Summary

‘I don’t think I realised how lonely I had become,’ Will says. Sat here this afternoon, he realises the cold pang in his chest has lessened. It had become so normal to feel that way, as if he was apart from the world, one step out, that he had stopped noticing he even felt that way. He had drowned himself in running the estate, and now, he knows, that in his absence, things have continued to run, and he is perhaps not as needed as he thought. Instead of being upset by this, he finds himself relieved. However, this realisation also comes with the pang of sadness as Walt will be leaving soon, and then he will have little to occupy his time. ‘With Walt leaving in a few weeks, I wonder what I will do without him.’

‘I had a thought about that actually,’ Hannibal says, leaning forward in his chair.

‘You did?’

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wakes in the middle of the night to the sound of wind and rain. The curtain is being blown into the room. In his half-asleep state, he briefly thinks there is some kind of apparition in his room. Once fully awake, though, he can hear the summer storm outside. The rain is also coming in through the window. He groans. It has been so hot he had asked Winston to keep it open. He looks to his left, and his crutches are carefully placed next to his bed. He gently swings his good leg over the bed and then moves his cast over the edge, wincing in pain as he does so. He reaches for the crutches and places them beneath his shoulders, and slowly stands. He’s getting better with them but still wants to take his time. He carefully hops over to the window. Putting all his weight on his good leg, he opens the curtain so he can reach the window. As he leans to grasp the metal handle, he sees something moving down the large driveway. The rain is heavy, so it’s hard to see. He can hear thunder rumbling in the distance, and then a flash of lightning reveals the dark figure as a man on horseback riding out towards the gates. Will leans closer to the window, but as soon as the flash has come, it’s gone, and he cannot see anything. The rider would be out of sight by now anyway. It looked like Hannibal’s black horse, but it couldn’t have been. Hannibal had business in the city these past few days and isn’t even at Wolf Estate. He must have imagined it. He closes the window and draws the curtain before making his way back to bed.

He falls to sleep relatively quickly. The sound of the rain and wind lull him. His dreams are dark, figures appearing from forests, things with antlers and feathers, heavy fogged breathing, footsteps surrounding him. A man with antlers stands behind him, a hand on his shoulder, a familiar weight. Will opens his eyes, sweat beading on his forehead as the morning light filters through the slight gap in the curtains. He sighs and feels even more exhausted than he did before he went to sleep. He blames the storm for his restlessness.

Winston soon appears and helps him get dressed. Thoughts of monsters and dark horsemen soon leave his mind burned away by the sunshine of what looks like a glorious day. A week passed since his fall. Hannibal procured a wheelchair as well as the crutches for Will so he can get around a bit easier. He still needs help getting down the stairs, dressed, in and out of bed, but at least he can wheel himself into the library or out into the garden during the day. Of course, a watchful eye is kept on him by Winston and the Count a lot of the time. The last few days, though, Hannibal has been absent - called back to the city. Will is trying and failing to ignore the fact that he misses the alpha. They had been spending a lot of time together. Hannibal reading to Will in the evenings, pushing him around the gardens, sitting together for meals. Walt and Abigail have been conspicuously absent, off on their own most days. Will thinks that for someone who claims not to want to marry Abigail, Walt spends an awful lot of his time with the young alpha.

This morning after help from Winston, he is safely ensconced in the library reading one of the many tomes. To spend this much time perusing the collection is an unexpected bonus of his broken leg. Hannibal has added a considerable amount to the collection, the shelves now bursting with volumes. It would take several lifetimes to get through it all. The sun shines through the tall windows with insistence, and it's still only just past nine. The storm last night seems to have done little to alleviate the heat of the day. Will was always more of a winter person. The heat makes him feel heavy, exhausted and drained. However, at the moment, despite the injury, he seems to be relishing the warmth of the sun. Moving his chair, so he sits in the puddle of sunshine. He closes his eyes, leans his head back and enjoys the warmth against his skin. He imagines the rays helping to knit his bones back together.

The idea of being healed, though, is oddly upsetting. He knows that he could easily go home now, despite Hannibal's insistence he stays, it would be difficult, but he could get into a carriage if he really wanted to. However, there is a large part of him that is content. A feeling he is not sure he's ever felt before. Just as he begins to dare his thoughts to go down this tangled path, the door opens. He turns his head to see Hannibal.

'I suspected I would find you here,' the Count says as he makes his way to Will, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder.

'Only a few places I can get to,' Will jokes. He looks up at Hannibal, who smiles down at him, a look of relief on his face. Will frowns, unsettled to think of Hannibal requiring relief. 'Difficult trip?'

Hannibal smiles and looks out at the garden. 'Let's just say I am glad to be back.'

‘I am happy you are back. It’s been very quiet with you gone,’ Will says, even now he has no idea where Walt and Abigail have gotten to.

‘I take it the children have been absent,’ Hannibal says as he moves to sit on one of the chairs by the window. Lit from behind, Will cannot see the Count’s face any longer. He moves his chair, so it’s closer and at an angle which means he can see Hannibal’s tired face.

‘Yes, busy doing whatever it is they do,’ Will says. ‘When did you get back? You look exhausted.’

Hannibal smiles. ‘That bad!’

‘No, I just meant are you alright?’ Will says.

‘Yes, tedious people, long days. It is me that should be asking about your health. You look well, though, despite the broken leg. How are you feeling?’

‘Fine, actually, better than I have in years, which is strange,’ Will admits. ‘You didn’t answer my question. When did you get back?’

‘This morning, rode through the night,’ Hannibal says and rubs his face with his hand. Will realises it couldn’t have been Hannibal he saw. He must have imagined it.

‘Why didn’t you take a carriage? You could have slept at least then?’ Will asks and sees a thought cross Hannibal’s mind, which is quickly hidden.

‘I prefer to ride,’ Hannibal replies.

‘Do you want some breakfast? I can call for someone.’

‘Have you eaten?’ Hannibal asks.

‘Yes, but there is always room for more tea,’ Will says with a smile. He begins to wheel himself around so he can pull the bell which rings down in the kitchen.

‘Wait,’ Hannibal says, placing a hand on Will’s knee. ‘I would just like a moment, some peace.’

‘Of course,’ Will says. ‘I will leave you to it.’

‘No,’ Hannibal says. ‘Stay, please?’

Will smiles and places his hand over Hannibal’s. ‘No place I’d rather be.’ They sit together. Silence settles between them, and Will can feel his contentment deepening.

‘Is the leg better? How is the pain?’ Hannibal asks.

‘Manageable. Could be worse.’

‘That’s good,’ Hannibal replies. ‘I was going to suggest if you would consider it, I believe Walt and Abigail are planning on fishing this afternoon, so I thought we could take the carriage down and join them.’

Will laughs. ‘Have you run this by them?’

‘I do not believe I need to. After all, it is my lake and my carriage,’ Hannibal says with a wry smile.

‘Then yes, let’s ruin their plans,’ Will says and smiles.

‘Good. I will go and bath first, get changed out of these travels clothes and organise some food for us all.’

‘I am sure I can manage the food. You go and get cleaned up,’ Will says. ‘I have become adept at the manoeuvring myself, so not to worry.’

Hannibal squeezes Will’s hand, smiles and stands. ‘Of course, well, I will see you in an hour?’

‘Perfect,’ Will says. ‘I will task Winston with tracking the children down. He always seems to know where they are.’

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Winston had indeed known and tasked Abigail and Walt to be present in the hall, ready to go, within the hour. Will heard the man barking orders at the two wards and smiled. He was overseeing the packing of the carriage- many baskets of food, some books, some wine sneaked in as well. Hannibal had appeared, as promised, looking refreshed and no longer weary. He looks the least formal Will had ever seen him dressed in light breaches, an open-collared shirt and ankle boots, and as the light hit his just-washed hair, he seemed to gleam, taking Will’s breath away.

‘Ah, Abigail! Walt! You are alive, after all!’ the Count says and embraces Abigail in a hug.

‘Yes, father, we missed you!’ Abigail says, and they part.

‘That is not what I have heard, too busy to entertain our guest here,’ the Count says, referring to Will.

‘I have been entertained plenty, don’t worry them, Hannibal, they are young and must have adventures,’ Will says and winks at Walt, who steadfastly ignores him.

‘We shall all have an adventure this afternoon,’ Hannibal says and laughs. ‘The horses are ready for you two. I shall accompany Will in the carriage. Winston, if you could put his chair on the trap at the back,’ Hannibal says, and before Will can protest at the realisation that

Hannibal intends to lift him, the Count has picked Will up in his arms and is heading outside. Will can feel the blush on his cheeks as he hears Abigail and Walt laughing loudly behind him.

As Hannibal carries him outside and into the waiting carriage, Will feels a little as if he is flying. He doesn't dare admit to himself how good it feels to be picked up like this. He knows Hannibal did it before, but Will wasn't conscious then. It is over all too soon, though, as the Count places him along the back bench of the carriage so he can keep his splint straight. There are cushions that Hannibal arranges around Will, supporting his back and propping up the splint. Hannibal joins him, sitting opposite, as Winston attaches the wheelchair to the back of the carriage and then hops upfront to drive them.

'Are you comfortable?' Hannibal asks.

Will has managed to get his breath back and is willing his body to forget the feeling of being lifted so easily. The anticipation of being lifted out once they get to the lake already beginning to bubble in his stomach.

'Yes, thank you,' Will says.

Hannibal bangs the side of the carriage to alert Winston they are ready to depart, and the carriage jerks forward. Will almost falls but is stopped by Hannibal's strong hands. Before he knows it, Hannibal has moved and is now sitting on the same bench as him, with Will leaning against the alpha's broad chest, kept in place by a strong arm.

'I don't want you to fall. This is the safest way to travel,' Hannibal says before Will can protest.

The rest of the journey is completed in silence. Will's eyes close as the warmth of Hannibal's chest floods his back, the gentle jostling of the carriage and the scent of the alpha even stronger than normal in such close quarters. Utter contentment spreads through him, and he cannot help but fall into a gentle doze. By the time they arrive at the lake, too shorter a trip, Will doesn't really want to move from the carriage. Eventually, Hannibal softly strokes his arm.

'Here we are,' the Count says, voice a whisper.

Will's eyes flicker open, and he looks up at Hannibal, who is smiling down at him with a look of contentment on his face.

'Sorry, must have dozed off there for a moment,' Will says, feeling that blush coming across his cheeks once more. He hopes Hannibal blames the heat of the day.

'It is good to see you relaxed. I am sorry to move you. We could always get Winston to drive around for a while?' Hannibal says, and Will gets the feeling the alpha is only half-joking.

Will laughs and shakes his head despite wanting to take him up on the offer.

'Probably a bit hot for the horse,' he says.

‘True,’ Hannibal agrees and begins to move to help Will out of the carriage.

They have been beaten there by Walt and Abigail, who are giggling and whispering to each other as Hannibal carries Will out of the carriage. Will frowns and shoots Walt a look that does nothing but makes the boy laugh even harder. Winston gets the wheelchair from the back of the carriage and sets it down under the shade of the willow tree on the dock at Hannibal’s instruction. Hannibal carries Will and sets him down in the chair.

‘Comfortable?’ Hannibal asks.

Will nods, but he misses the quiet closeness of the carriage and Hannibal’s arms. The alpha, Winston, Abigail and Walt then start setting up around Will, getting out a few chairs, blankets and the baskets of food, fishing equipment and books. Once all settled, Hannibal takes a seat beside Will, handing him a cool glass of white wine. They watch as Walt attempts to teach Abigail how to fish. This, apparently, is the first time they have actually attempted fishing, despite spending most days down here.

‘When your leg is healed, you will have to teach us all,’ Hannibal says with a smile, watching as the two wards struggle with a tangled line.

‘Yes, I think I will,’ he says and laughs.

The shade of the tree is cool, and there is a comfortable breeze playing in its branches. The air is filled with fluttering bird song and laughter. It is the most beautiful afternoon, and Will feels as if he has slipped into a dream.

Eventually, as the wine begins to do its work and the early afternoon sun rises, Will finds words easier to speak.

‘Can I admit something?’ Will says, turning his head to look at the alpha sat next to him. The dappled sunlight hits Hannibal’s tanned skin, making it glow. His eyes look almost red in this light.

Hannibal nods. ‘Of course.’

‘I wanted to thank you for everything, for your hospitality. It has been lovely staying here this past week,’ Will pauses for a moment before continuing. ‘I have found I’ve felt at home here for some reason. Perhaps just less haunted by memories.’

‘I am glad about that,’ Hannibal says. ‘I have enjoyed your company also. I find myself hoping you will stay longer.’

Will smiles. ‘I find myself wishing the same. I missed your company these past few days.’

‘As I did yours,’ Hannibal says.

‘I don’t think I realised how lonely I had become,’ Will says. Sat here this afternoon, he realises the cold pang in his chest has lessened. It had become so normal to feel that way, as if he was apart from the world, one step out, that he had stopped noticing he even felt that way. He had drowned himself in running the estate, and now, he knows, that in his absence,

things have continued to run, and he is perhaps not as needed as he thought. Instead of being upset by this, he finds himself relieved. However, this realisation also comes with the pang of sadness as Walt will be leaving soon, and then he will have little to occupy his time. 'With Walt leaving in a few weeks, I wonder what I will do without him.'

'I had a thought about that actually,' Hannibal says, leaning forward in his chair.

'You did?'

'Yes, I know that Margot and Alana will be introducing him to society while he is there, but I wondered if perhaps we could all do it together as I also plan formally to introduce Abigail. So you could come with Abigail and I in a few weeks, once Walt is settled, spend the season with us, see Walt, Alana and Margot. We could attend the balls together, perhaps go to some opera, see the sights, whatever you would like?'

Will thinks about this offer. Of course, his usual reaction would be no, the recluse in him always happy to stay in his study, ignoring the world.

He smiles and meets Hannibal's gaze. 'That may require me to be sociable,' he says.

Hannibal laughs at that, a bright, lyrical sound that Will cannot help but echo.

'Yes, indeed it might, but I will be with you, as will Alana, Margot, Walt and Abigail. Obviously, you can bring Winston and anyone else you may require.' There is a pause as Will looks out over the lake, watching Walt smiling and chatting easily. His ward, too, seems to have come into his own these past few weeks. 'You know Will. It may be time to realise that you are not, after all, alone in the world. There are people who care for you, who want to spend time with you. Your life did not end with the death of your spouse.'

Will looks at Hannibal, surprised by those words, true though they may be, the image of his wife appears in his mind, and that old cold stab of guilt guts him, tears prick at his eyes, unwanted, he wipes them away, looking over the river once more.

'I am sorry if I overstepped,' Hannibal says softly and brings his hand to cover Will's. 'I think you have not thought of anyone else other than Walt for the last few years, and now that the boy is becoming a man, you can turn your attention, once more, to yourself.'

Will breathes out a sigh, trying to find the peace he had but moments earlier, he takes Hannibal's hand in his own, the weight of those fingers intertwined with his, grounding.

'I am old, pre-bonded, and widowed,' Will says, his words coming out slowly. 'I am barely even an omega anymore. I must be one of the oldest unbonded around. I am not sure, exactly, what I am and who I am. Without Walt to take care of, I wonder how long I will last.'

Hannibal squeezes Will's hand, and he cannot help but look down at their fingers intertwined. 'You mustn't think like that. These last weeks you have seemed much brighter than when I first met you. I think you need company, people, family around you. It is the

best medicine. You are far from broken, you have many years ahead of you, yes you have been widowed, but that does not mean it is the end for you.'

'That's easy for you to say. You are an alpha. Omega's, we do not age the same way, especially without a partner,' Will says. He feels his age more and more these days - the remnants of bond sickness still cling to him.

'Will,' Hannibal's voice attracts Will's gaze, and he meets those red eyes, gleaming almost a burnt gold. 'You are not broken. Your leg maybe, yes, but that will heal. You, the core of you, the omega, he is not broken. I can see your strength. I have felt it from the moment I met you, and it only gets stronger. Come with us, come to the city. I have a large house, plenty of space. Come back to the world again. Allow yourself that. Allow me to guide you, support you, I promise. You may even enjoy yourself. There are many quiet places in the city I can show you. I know you would love the opera, trust me. If it really is just too awful, you can return home any time you want.'

Will smiles and realises that Hannibal might be right, he has been, too long, out of the world, and he needs to figure out what he's going to do next. Perhaps some time away from Trap Manor might give him the perspective he needs.

'Alright, yes,' Will says, and the smile on Hannibal's face is so wide he cannot help but laugh.

Chapter End Notes

comments are the gold flecks in Hannibal's eyes and kudos are the leaves of the willow tree gently rustling in the breeze.

More next week!

My Twitter

Lady DuMaurier

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is in the library, pacing. He can see he is beginning to wear a line in the rug. He stops and sighs. His skin is itchy, and he is, once again, too hot. The thought of going into a full rut at the back of his mind, he has not had one for many years. He had, in many ways, assumed he would never have one again.

Abigail is similarly bereft as Walt leaves for London tomorrow and so is at home packing, Will is helping him. They had already left it a week later than they meant to before leaving Wolf Manor. Abigail has taken to sleeping in and going for long walks in the gardens. Both of them aware that they will see the Grahams in just a few short weeks for the start of the season, but those short weeks seem like a lifetime.

Hannibal has organised everything for the trip. The tasks were managing to distract him for a couple of days. The house in the city is prepared for their arrival. His tailor, thanks to Winston giving him both Walts's and Will's measurements, is beavering away on new suits for Will and himself, as well as dresses for Abigail and some basics to get Walt started. Will, of course, knows nothing of this, and Hannibal hopes the stubborn omega will forgive him the indulgence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's sheets still smell of Will. His whole room does, the scent permeates the air, and he refuses to open the window. Every night he inhales the remnants of the omega and allows himself to indulge in fantasy. Will, whose body he only stole glances at when he changed him into a nightgown, is beautiful. He can still see the lithe, pale legs, the strong arms and smooth skin. The more time they had spent together, the more he had seen that beauty blossom. Will is older, yes, his beauty not youthful and fresh at first glance, but underneath, he can see the young omega Will would have been. Now, though, there is power in those bones, those muscles, behind those eyes. Untapped, barely contained power. Hannibal can sense it. He knows that something happened with Walt's father, which brought that power out briefly, and Will has been running from it ever since. Hiding. He doesn't want Will to hide anymore.

He knows that his servants are suspicious, or amused, or both with his behaviour, his refusal to change the sheets. Will and Walt have been gone for a few days, but each night is the same for Hannibal. He dreads and impatiently awaits the time he can go to his chambers. Breathe in that scent. Pine. Horses. Freshly fallen snow. Moss and musk. It makes every bone in him ache. He can feel it in the marrow of him. Will has invaded him, and he cannot get the omega out no matter how much he wants to.

He lies on the bed, head pressed to the pillow and breathes it in. Always naked. Always wanting. He moans into the feathers and scent. Unable to contain himself, he needs Will like he needs oxygen. Hannibal knows he needs to refocus. He has other things he needs to be tending to, he needs to get back to himself, and this, this rutting, moaning and needing is not the way. Yet, he finds himself, every night, cock hard and leaking, desperate for a release. He touches himself, imagines other hands, fingers slight and delicate, skin softer than it should be, pale but luminous, he imagines the warmth of those fingers wrapped around him, stroking. Will's smile, his laugh, the way the omega sometimes bites his lower lip, his eyes, looking up through long lashes, the intelligence behind them, the darkness, so clear and bright. He comes, over and over, spilling into his hand. Nothing satisfies him.

The thought that he may be coming into a full rut occupies his mind in these moments when his skin is on fire, and his mind is consumed with need. He can feel it in the day too. He is too hot. Everything is too loud, too quiet, too much, too little. He wonders if Will feels it too.

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Hannibal has organised everything for the trip. The tasks were managing to distract him for a couple of days. The house in the city is prepared for their arrival. His tailor, thanks to Winston giving him both Walts's and Will's measurements, is beavering away on new suits for Will and himself, as well as dresses for Abigail and some basics to get Walt started. Will, of course, knows nothing of this, and Hannibal hopes the stubborn omega will forgive him the indulgence. He rarely gets to spend his money on people he loves, spoiling Abigail often, but to spread this to others is a rare and wonderful thing. He wants this trip to go well for all of them.

He also really wants Will to feel comfortable and a part of his life. This unexpected friendship between them has been a most welcome to surprise to Hannibal. Even if he does want more, the one thing he does not want to lose is the omega's friendship. So rarely is he ever impressed by anyone. Will, to him, is one of the most singular people he has ever met. Accomplished, intelligent and interesting, qualities astonishingly rare, Hannibal has found, amongst most people. The omega has been through something that would have killed most, if not permanently damaged. However, as much as Will might think, the omega is not broken, but, in fact, resilient and very strong. Hannibal could see it the more time he spent in Will's presence.

Unsure how Will feels about him, Hannibal hopes this trip and time together will help them figure it out. Hannibal would very much like to show Will that, despite his protestations, the omega in him is still there and still in need of a mate. Someone to guide him, to show him all Will could be. Hannibal wants to be that person. He wants to peel back the walls and layers and find the brilliant omega beneath.

The door opens, and Abigail appears looking as miserable as he feels. She makes her way over to him and takes his hand.

'I miss them too,' she says.

Hannibal smiles and squeezes her hand. 'I know they are only down the road, but it is quiet here without them.'

'We will see them soon. You can see Will anytime you want. Walt leaves for the city tomorrow. I won't see him for weeks,' Abigail bemoans. 'Even then, he will be distracted by parties and work. He will have forgotten me completely.'

'That, I can assure you, is not possible,' Hannibal says and smiles. 'You are not that easy to forget.'

'I hope so, I miss him already, and he has only been gone a few days,' she says.

'We need a distraction, you and I,' Hannibal says. 'Perhaps a ride? We could go into town or visit Bedelia perhaps?'

'Oh yes, let's visit Bedelia! I am dying to see her new dresses! It's better than being here!' Abigail agrees. 'I am sure she will have news from the city.'

Hannibal laughs. 'Yes, I am sure she will.'

They take the carriage to Bedelia's. The day is cooler than it has been. Some summer showers mist the air causing a slight chill. The blue sky they have been enjoying is hiding behind a light grey. The journey to Bedelia's takes them on the road towards the city, past the woods where Hannibal had been fruitlessly frequenting each night in an attempt to catch his quarry. Since Will came to stay, he has been distracted, though, not wanting to risk Will waking in the night and seeing him. He came back early from the city that one stormy night and managed to go out hunting again unnoticed. He has not been for several days. He sighs and makes a plan to go tonight. Even if the weather is bad, he's done it before. The rain can be a good cover for him. Unfortunately, it can also be for his quarry.

When they arrive at Bedelia's large mansion, the light summer drizzle has turned to a full shower, so they dash from the carriage, and the servants get the horses into Bedelia's stable as soon as possible.

Bedelia greets them with warm hugs and an offer of much-needed tea. They sit in her spacious drawing-room. Yellow walls and looming family portraits adorn the walls. Tea is served, and the fire is lit, and soon Hannibal and Abigail are warm once again.

‘So, what brings you to my door?’ Bedelia says as she takes a sip from the bone china cup.

‘We were restless,’ Hannibal admits. ‘Thought we could do with a distraction.’

‘I am just a distraction?’ Bedelia says and raises an eyebrow.

‘No!’ Abigail says. ‘That’s not what Papa meant. We wanted to see you.’

Bedelia smiles and carefully places her teacup back on the saucer. ‘Of course, nothing to do with the new delivery of sample dresses I have received.’

Hannibal looks at Abigail, who is doing her best to look innocent, but it is clear now she knew of this and hence why she jumped at the chance to come. He rolls his eyes.

‘I had no idea that was today,’ Abigail says, and both Hannibal and Bedelia laugh.

‘Of course!’ Bedelia says. ‘Go on, my maid knows where they all are, have some fun, let me know which ones suit you, and I will add them to Hannibal’s account. After all, what else is he going to spend his money on.’

Hannibal frowns but nods his approval. Abigail jumps up, kisses Hannibal on the cheek and runs out of the room to find the maid.

‘You spoil her,’ Hannibal says.

‘As do you,’ Bedelia points out.

‘I cannot deny it,’ he says and sips his tea.

‘How are you doing, Hannibal? You look a little flushed,’ Bedelia asks. Hannibal does his best to try not to react to this observation.

‘It is a close day,’ he lies. ‘I am fine, you know me,’ Hannibal says.

‘How are things with Abigail? This Walt Graham she has been spending time with? What is happening there?’

Hannibal sighs. ‘Nothing. He is off to the city tomorrow. She will miss him. His guardian and I will accompany Abigail once the season starts, and she will see him again then.’

‘Will Graham?’ Bedelia asks. ‘The man who was staying with you these past few weeks.’

‘He broke his leg, Bedelia. It was my fault. The least I could do was treat him and make sure he was alright,’ Hannibal says, his voice as even as he can make it. This line of questioning from Bedelia, unwelcome.

‘You gave him your bed if the rumours are to be believed?’ She says this with only a slight raising of her eyebrow that gives her amusement away. Hannibal appreciates she is attempting to be discrete, but, as always, she cannot quite help herself but enquire. He wonders who has let this piece of information slip.

‘Yes,’ he says evenly. ‘But it was purely convenience. I slept in another room. Both our reputations are intact, I assure you.’

‘What about Abigail and Walt? Can you be sure her reputation remains intact?’

Hannibal sneers at the suggestion. ‘Yes, Bedelia, I would be thankful if you could not add to any gossip otherwise.’

Bedelia holds her hands up. ‘Hannibal, my dear, you know I adore Abigail as much as you. I would never do anything to harm her. I just want to make sure she has not been taken advantage of while you have been … distracted.’

That word irks him. She always does know him better than he would like. She has glimpsed his darkness but still stays. He allowed her this, both intrigued by the other. A rare experience in Hannibal’s life. Many thought they might marry. He always wondered if she would have wanted that, perhaps. ‘Distracted?’

‘Yes, with Will Graham, you spent an awful lot of time with him. He was at Wolf Manor for a few weeks, or have I got that wrong? Now he is going to be staying at your city residence. People may talk Hannibal.’

‘He is a friend,’ Hannibal reiterates. ‘He was recuperating. I was his physician. We get on. We are friends. You are always telling me I should have more friends.’

‘I am because you don’t have friends, Hannibal. You have acquaintances.’

‘You are my friend.’

‘I sometimes wonder if I am, I hope I am. I worry that when Abigail does marry, to someone suitable, someone that she will meet during the season under my supervision, that you will be left… adrift.’

‘Adrift?’ The word seems pointed to him, unsure as to what Bedelia is getting at. He just knows he is annoyed by this conversation.

‘A lack of apparent focus is not good for a single man Hannibal. You know that.’

Hannibal sighs and decides to leave that comment for the moment. ‘You do not approve of Walt?’

‘Do you?’

‘He is a fine young man,’ Hannibal says. ‘Abigail could do worse.’

‘Hardly a ringing endorsement. He is a beta, though? Correct?’

Hannibal nods. ‘Yes.’

‘She is an alpha, one with great connections. She needs someone worthy. Someone with some standing, someone she can have a family with.’

‘I am proof that biology does not stop one from having a family, Bedelia,’ Hannibal says. ‘Abigail is as much mine as if she was from my blood. Will feels the same about Walt. She can have children no matter who she ends up with. There are always those in need of a home or other options.’

‘Some breeding omega or beta female, I should hope not. She can do better than that. Or some waif from the street.’

‘In many ways, Abigail was a waif from the street, and, as you may recall, was I.’

‘Hardly the same, you are a Count,’ Bedelia says.

‘Let’s us move on from this, Bedelia. Whoever Abigail marries will be her choice,’ Hannibal says, willing her to get that hint that his patience is wearing thin.

‘I just worry for you Hannibal, have you thought about what you might do when Abigail is married?’

Hannibal hadn’t, if he is honest with himself. Abigail is the only family other than Chiyoh. He has left. Abigail is his daughter, and he cannot imagine his life without her. Perhaps Bedelia is right, part of this connection to Will is some kind of preemptive attempt to fill a void. Yet, he knows it’s not. He knows the pull towards Will is more than loneliness, biology or anything else. They are two sides of the same coin. He can feel it when he looks at him, his perfect opposite. ‘I will be fine.’

‘Is this why you are so interested in Will Graham, you would like him to be your friend?’

He is always amazed at how easily she slips into his thoughts. He sighs. ‘Yes, he and I have a connection. We understand each other. It’s… refreshing.’

‘Does he understand you? Does he know the real you?’

‘We have spent a lot of time together. He is going to stay with me when Abigail and I go to the city.’

‘Really? Is that a good idea?’

‘Why would it not? He has been staying in my house for the past few weeks.’

‘Yes but the city house is smaller, less space to…hide.’

She is being more brazen than usual, and he does not appreciate it. Abigail could appear any moment and he does not trust Bedelia’s servants to be discrete. ‘I don’t know to what you are referring, Bedelia.’

‘I just want Abigail and you to be safe, that’s all. Just be careful. I hear Will Graham is quite close to Detective Crawford.’

‘What does that have to do with anything?’

‘Crawford has been sniffing around lately, investigating these disappearances and such. Hannibal, we both know you have a past, some things that you would not like to be known. I am merely saying that this Will Graham is not a whimpering, young omega who can you can easily control. He is intelligent and well connected. Just tread carefully.’

Before he can respond, Abigail bursts into the room, wearing a pale blue lace and silk ensemble that Hannibal thinks looks as if it costs about the same as the house they are sitting in.

‘What do you think?’ She says, twirling around.

Hannibal stands and walks over to her, aware that Bedelia is still watching him. ‘Beautiful, my darling girl, you will be the belle of every ball!’

Abigail laughs and looks at Bedelia. ‘What do you think Bedelia?’

‘I think it’s perfect,’ Bedelia says.

Abigail looks between the two of them and sighs. ‘What have you been discussing? Papa you seem more cross than when I left!’

He smiles at her, she could always read him. ‘No, not at all.’

‘Oh, Bedelia, is it Walt and Will? Are you concerned about it all? I promise once you meet them you will see how wonderful they are. So you will come for dinner at the city house with us all?’ She looks at Hannibal. ‘Please papa let’s have a meal all of us so Bedelia can meet them.’

Hannibal looks at Bedelia. ‘What do you think? Reserve judgement until then?’

Bedelia smiles and nods. ‘Of course, how can I resist you, darling Abigail!’

Chapter End Notes

comments are Hannibal's frustrated moans and kudos are Abigail's wistful sighs

xxx

A Close Journey

Chapter Summary

Shall we make a promise to each other before we start these weeks together?'

'A promise?'

'Yes,' Hannibal says, eyes serious and dark. 'That we shall endeavour to be honest with each other.'

'What do you mean?'

'If things become too much, if you need a break, or if you want to tell me something, anything, you will?'

Will looks at Hannibal and as heat burns at the base of his spine. 'Like what?'

'I just mean we have spent the last weeks missing each other. Let's not do that. I find I enjoy you, Will, being around you. I hope you don't mind me saying but I feel as if you may feel the same way. That perhaps we have a connection. All I am asking is that we use these few weeks to, shall we say, explore it. Honestly and openly. No expectations, just spending time together.'

Will is taken aback. He knew he had felt such a connection, but to hear that Hannibal had been feeling it, too, makes everything even more complicated. Or, perhaps, he thinks, it doesn't.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for last week! But here have 2 chapters!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is waiting, with somewhat bated breath, for Hannibal's arrival. His leg now mostly healed, he has the use of a cane to help him balance, but soon even that will not be needed. Walt left for Baltimore a few weeks ago. He has received a few letters from his ward, who appears to be settling in well. Walt has a small apartment provided to him by the law firm and insists it fulfils his needs. Will feels a little bad that he will be staying at, what he imagines is the quite grand, Lecter city residence with the Count and Abigail. Winston is

accompanying Will. The rest of the servants are staying to help run the estate as they have been doing for the last few months while Will recuperated.

Winston, of course, has everything organised and has been in contact with Hannibal's staff so has it all under control. All Will has to do is stand here, the entrance hall of his home, and wait. Trap Manor has felt less like home these past few months, as he has barely been here, and now with Walt gone, it has felt even more empty. He has been missing Hannibal. A fact that has made him question a lot of things. He has never felt better these past few months. In Hannibal's company, he has felt almost young again. His omegan biology also seems to be asserting itself. When he first got back from Wolf House, he had worried he was going into heat. The dreams and feelings of need were almost overwhelming. He had doubled his tonics and ensured that Winston had extras for the trip to London.

All of this has left Will feeling unsure. Unsure about everything - himself, Hannibal, his future, all of it seems so fragile. The fact that he knows the moment Hannibal appears he will feel better, both comforts and terrifies him. As he touches his waistcoat pocket, where the small framed picture of his wife resides, he looks up at the portrait of Molly still hanging above the stairs, her soft features and impish smile captured beautifully, and sighs. He wonders what she would have thought of all this. He can still hear her laugh, her teasing, but also her wisdom. He misses that more than anything.

'Sir, the carriage is here,' Winston says. Will has one last look at his wife, taps his waistcoat pocket, and looks at his servant.

'Right, then this is it,' Will says and smiles.

Winston walks to him and gently touches his arm. 'It will be good to see Master Walt,' the man says and looks up at the painting. 'She would be proud of both of you.'

Will smiles and nods his head, always thankful for Winston and so glad that he will have the man's quiet unending support on this trip. 'Thank you, Winston, I needed that.'

'My pleasure Sir, now best not to keep the Count waiting. I will follow in the Trap carriage with all the luggage.'

'All the luggage? How much do we have?' Will exclaims as Winston leads him outside to the bright sunshine.

'Don't worry about a thing, Sir. It is all taken care of,' Winston says, and before Will can ask more, he sees Hannibal standing by the open carriage door smiling.

'Will! I guess I do not need to carry you this time,' Hannibal says and laughs.

He hopes the hot day will hide his blush. 'Indeed, a relief for you, I am sure.'

'It is good to see you are looking better, we will have much dancing to do, and I would hate for you to miss out,' Hannibal says and laughs.

‘No-one said anything about dancing,’ Will exclaims as he gets closer to the Count. As predicted, all his worries melt away as he breathes in that red wine, old books and the slightly coppery tang of the alpha’s scent. ‘I had hoped those days were past me!’

‘Not just a young man’s game, I can assure you,’ Hannibal says, leaning in closer, and Will is sure the alpha breathes him in.

‘Huh, we shall see,’ Will says.

‘Do you need a hand with the step?’ Hannibal asks.

‘No, I’ve got the cane, thank you, though,’ Will replies.

Hannibal holds out his arm anyway. ‘Just in case.’

Will manages on unsteady legs to get into the carriage where he expects to see Abigail, but it is empty. Instead, he is closely followed by Hannibal, who sits down opposite him.

‘Where is Abigail?’ Will asks.

‘Oh, she is going ahead with Bedelia, they have many things to discuss, and if I am honest, when they are together, it is a little exhausting. So I thought I would ease you into things with just me.’

‘I don’t want to be an inconvenience,’ Will says, already feeling awkward.

‘Zounds no! That is not what I meant,’ Hannibal says and places a warm hand on Will’s knee. ‘I promise you this benefits us both.’

Before Will can ask what that means, Hannibal hits the side of the carriage, and it pulls off. He can hear Winston’s carriage following behind them.

‘Have you heard from Walt?’ Hannibal asks, and Will is relieved to have something to occupy his mind.

‘Yes, he writes every few days. He is settling in well. I am looking forward to seeing him. He is very much looking forward to seeing Abigail,’ Will says as most of Walt’s letters have contained some anecdote related to the girl.

‘Yes, they seem to write to each other daily. The postmaster is now a regular visitor. I think he will enjoy the break when they are reunited.’

Will laughs. ‘Yes, yes, I suspect as much.’

‘And you? How have you been with Walt’s absence?’

‘It’s been quiet, but I have had things to distract me. How have you and Abigail been?’

‘Oh well, she has been practically living at Bedelia’s trying on new dresses and costing me a small fortune. I have been busy preparing everything for your visit.’

‘I hope you have not gone to any trouble.’

Hannibal smiles, and it makes Will worry. It looks like too much of a knowing smile.

‘For you, nothing is too much trouble,’ Hannibal says, and Will blushes again. He needs to get a hold of himself. ‘May I admit something to you?’ Hannibal asks.

Will laughs and remembers his admission by the lake that started all this. ‘Of course,’ he says.

‘I have missed you,’ Hannibal says, his voice soft.

Will meets Hannibal’s gaze and smiles. ‘I have also missed you.’

‘I wanted to visit, but I felt like I might be crowding you.’

Will laughs as relief washes over him. ‘I had thought the same.’

‘Shall we make a promise to each other before we start these weeks together?’

‘A promise?’

‘Yes,’ Hannibal says, eyes serious and dark. ‘That we shall endeavour to be honest with each other.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘If things become too much, if you need a break, or if you want to tell me something, anything, you will?’

Will looks at Hannibal and as heat burns at the base of his spine. ‘Like what?’

‘I just mean we have spent the last weeks missing each other. Let’s not do that. I find I enjoy you, Will, being around you. I hope you don’t mind me saying but I feel as if you may feel the same way. That perhaps we have a connection. All I am asking is that we use these few weeks to, shall we say, explore it. Honestly and openly. No expectations, just spending time together.’

Will is taken aback. He knew he had felt such a connection, but to hear that Hannibal had been feeling it, too, makes everything even more complicated. Or, perhaps, he thinks, it doesn’t.

‘No expectations?’ Will asks.

‘None,’ Hannibal says.

‘Then, yes.’

‘Good.’

‘In the spirit of honesty, then I too have felt a connection between us, I will admit that. Although, I do not know what it is. I am unsure if it can be anything. But, I want you to know that. So, for now, can we just say we are friends? And, as you say, we enjoy each other.’

Hannibal smiles and leans over to take Will’s hand in his own. ‘That is all I need.’

Once they arrive at Hannibal’s City residence, Will is relaxed and looking forward to the weeks ahead. The journey had been pleasant, catching up with Hannibal, who informed Will of some of the plans for the weeks, was enjoyable. It would have normally sounded daunting, but Will is sure with the alpha by his side he will be able to enjoy his time. He is also very much looking forward to seeing Walt and Abigail again. He had missed watching their friendship blossom. Abigail’s bright smile and Walt seems so at ease with her. It is nice to see.

Hannibal’s residence is a large stone townhouse with steps leading up to the glossy painted front door. The carriages pull up, and this time Will did accept Hannibal’s help climbing out, as his leg had become rather stiff from the journey. He looks up at the imposing building and swallows a gulp. It is about the same size as Trap Manor, probably bigger on the inside. It is all a little intimidating. As if sensing Will’s unease, Hannibal places a gentle hand on his shoulder, and he turns to looks at the alpha, who smiles easily back at him.

‘Shall we?’ Hannibal says, and Will nods.

The Count leads Will up the steps. As they get to the top, the door is opened by a short but serious-looking man with closely cropped hair and dark eyes.

‘Afternoon M’Lord and Lord Graham, I trust the journey was not too trying?’ the man says.

‘It was perfect, made much easier by the company,’ Hannibal says, and Will is starting to think his blush might become permanent at the rate. ‘This is Matthew Brown, Will. He is my city valet. Anything you or Winston need, please just ask.’

‘I am at your service,’ Brown says and bows his head slightly.

‘Thank you,’ Will says.

‘Come, everything is prepared,’ Brown says and steps aside, letting Hannibal and Will pass.

‘Is Abigail here yet, Brown?’ Hannibal asks.

‘Expected any moment, I believe she is bringing Lady DuMaurier with her,’ Brown says.

‘Perfect, it will be good for you to meet her, Will,’ Hannibal says. ‘She can be a little formidable, so best to get the first meeting out of the way.’

‘Right, baptism of fire then,’ Will says, only half-joking.

‘I will be with you the entire time,’ Hannibal reassures.

The entrance hall to the house is dark with a wide tiled floor, wood panels and a large circular table in the centre with a bright arrangement of freshly cut flowers. The smell permeates the room, sweet and almost sickly. Large portraits are hanging on the walls of, who Will assumes, is Hannibal’s family, he looks at the faces and sees the telling bone structure and dark eyes.

‘Brown, if you can let Winston know the ropes and show him where Will’s room is and where he will be staying, help him with the luggage. Will and I can take some tea in the drawing-room before the ladies arrive.’

‘Of course, M’Lord, I believe Mistress Chiyoh is setting up as we speak,’ Brown says and nods his head before heading out to meet Winston.

‘Chiyoh?’ Will asks.

‘She is the head of household here, runs everything for me like clockwork. She was a ward of my late Aunt,’ Hannibal says and leads Will through the entrance hall down a corridor towards a large drawing room, complete with yet more paintings, mostly landscapes, and comfortable looking couches and a piano in the corner by the window. The ceilings are tall with elaborate cornice work that Will cannot help admire as they walk through. Large crystal chandeliers gleam in the light pouring in from the wide bay window.

A tall, slim, elegant woman of Oriental origin is standing by the empty fireplace and turns as they enter the drawing-room. Her smile is careful. She is dressed in dark clothes with a belt from which a ring of keys hangs. She clasps her hands together and bows her head when she sees Hannibal.

‘My dear Chiyoh!’ Hannibal says and makes his way to her, taking her hands in his and bowing his head. The Count turns to Will and gestures to him. ‘This is Will Graham.’

The woman looks at Will, assessing. Her gaze goes from his toes to the top of his head before settling on his eyes. She smiles again, but it does not reach her eyes.

‘It is good to meet you,’ she says, her accent is lilting and soft, belying her rather harsh but undeniably beautiful exterior. She turns her attention back to Hannibal. ‘I have set tea out for four. If there is anything you need, just ring.’

‘Thank you, my dear,’ Hannibal says.

Chiyoh walks towards Will, stopping briefly to look him up and down again before bowing her head and leaving the room.

‘Are all your servants so…’

‘Intimidating?’ Hannibal supplies.

Will laughs. ‘Yes!’

‘They are just protective of us. Once they get to know you, they soften. Please take a seat.’

‘I might just stand for a moment if you don’t mind. My leg is still a little stiff,’ Will says and begins to walk around the room looking at the paintings.

‘Of course, is there anything I can get you for the pain?’

‘No, no, it does not hurt, just needs to move,’ Will says. He has found one painting on the far wall which has caught his eye. He looks at it and then at Hannibal. ‘This one is rather… well risqué….’

Hannibal laughs and makes his way over to Will. The painting is of a naked and sprawled Leda with a swan between her legs.

‘I like to surprise people,’ Hannibal says.

‘I am beginning to realise that about you,’ Will says. He has thought this ever since he first met Hannibal. The man should be one thing, a pedigree alpha, a Count, yet manages always to be his own person. It is something that Will admires about him, how comfortable the alpha seems to be in his own skin.

‘Do I surprise you?’ Hannibal asks. His eyes are twinkling, red flecked with amber.

‘Oh no! Papa! You said you would get Chiyoh to take it down!’ a voice says from the doorway. They both turn to see Abigail accompanied by a small woman with blonde hair piled high on her head, a dress made of grey satin, trimmed with fine lace. Her blue eyes brought out by the shimmering satin of her dress.

‘I believe Will was admiring it rather than admonishing me,’ Hannibal says. ‘Unless I was incorrect?’

Will just laughs and decides it’s best not to get involved.

Hannibal squeezes Will’s hand gently before making his way to his ward. Will doesn’t have time to process the gesture as Lady DuMaurier has managed to float across the room to him. They both look as Hannibal and Abigail embrace, Will cannot help but be moved by the way he strokes a protective hand down her hair.

‘They are a wonderful pair,’ Bedelia says, looking up at Will with inscrutable eyes.

‘Yes, yes they are,’ Will agrees. He knows the bond between a ward and guardian more than most. ‘It is something we have in common, our need to protect those we care for.’

Bedelia smiles, cat-like, seemingly pleased with his response. Abigail and Hannibal have parted, and she is making her towards Will, embracing him. ‘Will! It is so good to see you. We’ve missed you!’

‘It is good to see you too, Abigail,’ he says, and they all make their way to the couches to sit. Hannibal waits for the ladies to take a seat before hovering near Will and guiding him to take a seat next to himself. Will is relieved to have the support.

‘So, Will, may I call you, Will?’ Bedelia asks.

‘Yes, I never really felt like a Lord,’ Will says.

‘Well, one must be what one must be,’ Bedelia says. ‘How is the leg?’ she asks before he can respond.

‘Healing more each day,’ he says. ‘Thank you for asking.’

‘Is young Master Walt joining us?’ she says looking at Will then at Abigail.

‘He finishes work at four o’clock, so he will be along soon,’ Abigail says, looking at the clock on the mantel, impatient.

Will smiles thinking of all the letters they have been writing to each other. He catches Hannibal’s eye and exchanges a knowing look.

‘Abigail,’ Bedelia says. ‘Try to show some decorum!’

‘I haven’t seen him for weeks, Aunt!’ Abigail moans.

‘Young love,’ Hannibal interject. ‘We must revel in it Bedelia, we were all young once.’

‘Of course, perhaps while we wait, Abigail, you could entertain us with a new piece?’ Bedelia says, apparently ignoring Hannibal.

Abigail smiles and rises elegantly, making her way to the piano by the window. Will has a suspicion she is using this as an opportunity to keep an eye out for Walt. She begins playing, and her soft, gentle voice accompanies the music. Hannibal pours tea for them all, and Will is relieved to have a moment to collect his thoughts.

Once finished, Abigail carefully closes the piano cover and walks back over to the group.

‘I remembered I have something for Will, may I go and get it from my room?’ she asks, in the most innocent voice possible, one Will is not buying for a moment.

Hannibal smiles. ‘Of course, but hurry back.’

Chapter End Notes

comments are Will's ever blushing cheeks and kudos is Hanniba's knowing smile...

A proposal

Chapter Summary

> ‘He will only marry Abigail once he has earned enough money to do so. He has already achieved a permanent position at the law firm. He is intelligent and hard-working, so I know he will do it, but I also know it will take time. I do not think it is fair of him to ask Abigail, who has so many prospects, to wait for him.’
>
> ‘I see,’ Hannibal says. Will looks at the alpha, trying to read his expression, there is perhaps a small smile, but Will is unsure.
>
> ‘I was hoping perhaps you might think of a solution that had not crossed my mind. Mostly I just wanted you to be aware of everything that was happening,’ Will says. ‘Firstly, would you even approve of their union?’
>
> Hannibal places his glass down on the table and looks at Will. ‘Of course, if it is what Abigail desires, then yes. You were right to bring this to me. There is a simple answer,’ Hannibal says, and Will feels like a fool as he has not seen a solution. He was hoping that perhaps if Hannibal promised not to merge the estates and if Walt paid him back the dowry over a long amount of time, an arrangement could be made to suit them all. He is pretty sure Hannibal does not care about money. He has enough of it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Walt can see Abigail at the piano as her soft voice lilts through the window pane like a whisper. He smiles at her and she does her best to not react. They had agreed this and he gives her a nod before making his way to the servants entrance at the back of the house. He waits just out of sight, leaning against a wall, listening to the goings on inside the house. The kitchen is busy, lots of shouting and noise as they prepare dinner for this evening. If he is honest, Walt is dreading dinner, he knows Lady Du Maurier is joining them and she is more than a bit suspicious of Walt. He is looking forward to seeing Will and Hannibal. He likes the Count a lot, but he also is worried about what they will both think if the true nature of his and Abigail’s relationship is revealed.

At first, they were just friends, but then he stayed at Wolf Manor and they became closer, he was drawn to Abigail more and more. He didn’t want to fall for her but soon it was beyond his control. The sneaking about added to the excitement. He also did not want to marry her without securing a life of his own, worried mostly about Will, he wanted to be able to secure Trap Manor independent of any dowry from the Count. The estate was his mother’s legacy and the thought of it just being swallowed up by the Count and his estate irked him, it’s not what she would have wanted. He can see the Count and Will becoming close, and he finds he

is made a little uncomfortable by it. He wishes he could be happier, perhaps if it was someone else, but then the thought of Will with anyone else seems so strange to him. The only way to solve his worries is to speak to Will, and he resolves to do so before the evening is over.

His work is going well, he is liked, and he makes the most of his mother's connections. He hopes that in a few years, hopefully less, he will be able to marry without losing his name and estate. If only Abigail were not an alpha. If only he was not so drawn to her. He has had offers since being here. Lady Lounds, an omega, has made her interest clear. Frederika is from a good family she would be a better match for Walt's plans than Abigail, but he does not feel the same way about her that he does Abigail.

'Walt?' a whispered voice says.

'Abi?' he says and looks around the corner to see her standing there. His heart skips a beat, she is even more beautiful than he remembers, and all thoughts of Miss Lounds are instantly swept from his mind.

'Walt! We don't have long!' she says moving quickly to stand beside him, they are hidden from prying eyes back here for now.

He instantly grabs her, his hands slipping around her slim waist, he kisses her fiercely, their lips clash and she moans in his arms. Eventually they part, foreheads touching, he traces a finger down her cheek, neck, tracing her scar gently.

'I missed you,' he says and kisses her again, his hand slipping to the nape of her neck, fingers grasping at the soft, warm skin he finds.

'I missed you!' she says. 'Are you staying here tonight?'

'I wasn't planning on it,' he says, the thought had occurred to him, perhaps he could sneak to Abigail's room this evening but it was risky.

'Please,' she says kissing him gently.

'I can try, its risky though,' he says.

'We managed it before.'

'That was a much bigger house,' Walt says. He was staying on the side of the house that was near Abigail's bedroom a whole floor away from Will and Hannibal's rooms.

'I can come to you, it will be less suspicious,' she says.

'Maybe, let me kiss you once more.'

Kissing Abigail is like falling from a great height, every fibre of his being is alive with sensation, the connection between them is more and more difficult to contain. He has craved her these past weeks, now his addiction is satiated, but he knows he will want more, this

moment far too fleeting. They part, and she looks at him with the same hunger he knows resides in his own eyes.

'I wish we could just be together, my love,' she says, her voice a soft caress against his skin. He wants to give in. He would give her everything if he could.

'Soon, Abi, I promise, I just need a little more time. Promise me you will wait?' he says. The possibility that she will meet someone else in the upcoming weeks of balls and events is not lost on him. He knows Lady Du Maurier has more than few suitors lined up for her, all of which would be better for her than him.

'I promise, you know you are the only one for me,' she says. 'You must promise too. I have heard about you and Miss Lounds, you know.'

He looks into her eyes and sees hurt there, and he feels a stab of guilt at being the cause of her pain. 'Nothing has happened between us.' It is the truth, but it has also been close. He has missed his Abi and craved any kind of touch. 'I would never betray you,' he says.

'Good,' she says and kisses him again. 'Ah! I wish we had more time. Promise me you will stay tonight so we can talk properly once they have all gone to bed?'

'I will try,' he says.

She stands a little taller than she was and presses a hand against his chest. Moments like this, when the alpha in her comes to the forefront he loves, he can see the fire in her eyes.

'Promise me,' she says. Her voice resonates inside him, and he cannot help but moan.

'Yes, of course, yes,' he relents, and she smiles.

'I'll go in first. You go back around the front and come in properly,' she says. 'Wait a few moments so I can get Will's present.'

He takes her hand and kisses her delicate fingers. She smiles, and he can feel a part of him melt. 'See you soon, Abi,' he says, and she is off.

Walt knocks on the door of Will's room and is greeted with a muffled shout of something he takes as an invitation to enter. He walks in and finds Will surrounded by trunks of clothing.

'How much did you bring? I had no idea you even owned this many clothes!' Walt says, laughing.

Will turns around and sees Walt, the look of exasperation leaving his face at the sight of his ward, which makes Walt smile. He has missed his guardian more than he thought he would.

'Oh, Walt! I don't!' his guardian says and carefully manages to make his way over to Walt, guiding him to the side of the bed. They both take a seat. 'It's Hannibal! He has gone overboard with all this. There are not even enough days in a year to wear every outfit. He

told me to choose what I wanted to keep, but I have no idea where to start. I think I may just have to get Winston to sort through it while we are at dinner. Maybe you could help me pick something for tonight?'

'Of course,' Walt says.

'It's good to see you. Tea earlier was rather fraught. I am not looking forward to this evening. Bedelia is a bit of a dragon,' Will says. The afternoon had been a little like an interrogation for both Will and Walt. He has no idea what more questions Lady Du Maurier can come up with for them, but somehow, he is sure she will find some.

'I felt rather like a prisoner being questioned,' Walt admits. 'You held your own though, Will. Hannibal had your back as he promised he would.'

'Yes, some relief there. I am starting to wonder why on earth I agreed to all this in the first place,' Will says, looking around the room at the overflowing trunks of clothes. 'I am glad you are here. How are things going? Honestly.'

Walt smiles and appreciates Will's concern. 'Honestly good, the apprenticeship is going very well. They will employ me permanently from next month, so I will have a regular wage and a chance to move up the ladder.'

'Walt! That's wonderful! Why didn't you brag to Lady Du Maurier about that?'

'I wanted to tell you first,' he says. He knows how much Will has worked for him, and he wanted to share this news with his guardian first and foremost, then Abi, of course.

'Congratulations! You can brag about it at dinner,' Will says.

'I need to tell Abi- I mean Abigail first,' Walt corrects himself.

'Abi?' Will smiles. 'So something is going on there? I knew it. She snuck out to see you before you came in, didn't she? Using that book as an excuse.'

He should know by now that not much gets past Will. He wonders if Hannibal noticed.

'How did you…?'

'I know you, and she is not as innocent as she likes to make out. Is it love then? Between you?'

Walt sighs heavily. How to answer that question? 'What about you and Hannibal?' Will looks at him, shock written on his face. 'You also are not as subtle as you think.'

'We are just friends, Walt, nothing more.'

'A friend who buys you an entire wardrobe?'

Will frowns. 'Apparently. We are just friends, though, Walt.'

‘I wanted to talk to you about something, as we have a moment,’ Walt says and takes a deep breath. ‘I want Trap Manor to stay in my mother’s name, in her family. That’s why I won’t commit to Abigail. I want to be able to secure it without a dowry from the Count.’

‘So you were worried that if Hannibal and I become a pair, he will buy out Trap Manor from you,’ Will says, his voice even. ‘You think I would give away your legacy without consulting you?’

‘No, no, Will, I didn’t mean that, and I don’t want to upset you. That’s why I wanted to speak, to let you know my intentions.’

‘So you do have intentions towards Abigail? What are your intentions with her? She is clearly besotted, Walt. I hope you are not leading her along. I have taught you better, I hope.’

‘She knows my plans, she is happy to wait for me, I do intend to the right thing. I just need to make sure everything is in place.’

‘Have you or Abigail spoken to Hannibal about this? He would understand.’

‘I am sure he would offer to loan me the money, and I don’t want that. I need to know I did this on my own, for my mother.’

‘She would be proud of you, either way, Walt. All she ever wanted was for you to be happy.’

‘I know, but I want to do this for her and also for me. I want her name to carry on. Abigail is an alpha, so the only way I can do that is to make sure I have something for future generations to inherit. I want, as well, for you to be secure. I consider you a father, Will. I hope you know that.’

‘Walt, that means the world to me. I, too, consider you a son. I just don’t want you thinking you have to take this on all by yourself. I can help you. Hannibal can help you. As for him and I, well, you know my heart will always belong to your mother,’ Will says and fishes out a small framed picture and hands it to Walt. ‘She is always with me, Walt. We were bonded, still are. I cannot just move on from that. Hannibal is my friend, someone who makes me feel like myself again for the first time in a long time, but that does not mean I am ready, or indeed, able to move on. I don’t even think it would be possible for me to be intimate with anyone. I… well, it’s complicated and private. I can assure you that if anything were to change, you would be the first to know.’

‘I didn’t mean to pry. It’s just I see the way he looks at you sometimes.’

Will shakes his head. ‘ I think you are reading too much into it. You are not prying. In regards to Abigail, all I ask is that you take care. Do not hurt her.’

‘I won’t. I never could,’ he says.

‘Well, I say, for now, can we try and find something for me to wear?’

Walt laughs. ‘Yes, let’s start with that!’

With Walt's assistance, Will had finally settled on dark breeches with a navy coat, white shirt, and boots. The clothes fit him perfectly. As he looks at his reflection, he finds he barely recognise the man staring back. These past few years, he has not been paying too much attention to his appearance, there not being any real need to. He has felt old beyond his years, the omega he once was seeming a long time ago. Seeing himself this evening, his skin pale but not sallow, his eyes bright and, even his usually unruly curls tamed to something resembling a style, he looks closer to the man he was when he first met Molly.

Walt had left him to find Winston and ask him to sort through the trunks of clothes in Will's room, so he is alone when he leaves the room and finds Hannibal at the top of the stairs waiting for him.

'Will, you look lovely,' Hannibal says and makes his way towards him. The alpha is wearing a green well-fitting jacket, light breaches and a cream cravat. The sight of him standing there waiting for Will takes his breath away, and he can feel that blush coming back at the compliment from the Count.

'Thank you, I had some help,' Will admits. 'I was at a loss, but Walt luckily saved the day.'

'Well then, I shall thank him,' Hannibal says. 'I thought perhaps you would appreciate some company to dinner, safety in numbers.'

Will laughs and nods. 'Yes, thank you. Actually, now that I have you alone, could I speak with you about something.'

Hannibal nods his head and takes Will's hand before leading him back along the hallway to a room at the top of a small staircase. The Count opens the door, and Will follows him inside. The room is large, especially for a townhouse. There is a fireplace where a small fire is burning, a large wooden four-poster bed with heavy damask drapes, the walls are a deep navy blue, and the curtains framing the large window are gold. There is a huge gleaming chandelier in the centre of the room. Two leather winged back chairs are set by the fire, and there is a small table between them with a decanter full of a burnished brown liquid with two crystal glasses placed neatly beside it. Will realises this is Hannibal's bedroom and swallows another gulp.

'Come, sit. We have some time before dinner,' Hannibal says, gesturing to the winged back chairs. 'Would you like a brandy?'

Will nods and makes his way to one of the chairs where he sits down as Hannibal busies himself pouring them a small glass of brandy each before sitting in the vacant chair.

'Thank you,' Will says, taking the glass and sipping the warming liquid.

'What was it you wanted to speak to me about?' Hannibal asks.

'I assume you have noticed that Abigail and Walt have become close,' Will says. He cannot imagine it has escaped Hannibal's notice. 'I wanted to speak with you as we made a promise

to each other.'

'I am aware of their closeness, yes,' Hannibal says evenly.

'I spoke to Walt about his intentions. I did not want Abigail getting hurt.'

'I appreciate you looking out for her, but I believe Walt to be an honourable young man. You have raised him well.'

'I believe the same, I know Walt, and I know he would never hurt anyone intentionally. But I wanted to understand why they were hiding it.'

'Was he forthcoming?'

'Yes, he was, and that's what I wanted to speak with you about. He will be furious with me for telling you, but I value our friendship, and I also care for Abigail. Walt has always been fiercely independent. I imagine it comes from losing his mother at such a young age, and I was ill for the first year of her passing. I was, perhaps, not around as much as I could have been. The servants and Margot and Alana were there for him, but of course, nothing can replace a mother's love. He feels a strong need to able to support himself. He loves and cares for Abigail a great deal. He intends to marry her with your blessing. However, he also does not want the Trap Estate to be lost. He wants his mother's legacy to remain intact. As Abigail is an alpha, he will lose his name in the marriage, and he is also aware a dowry from you would pay for the debts on the estate and effectively merge the two estates again. I am still the named guardian of Trap Estate, so that will not change until Walt is married. Molly tried to get that changed, but as Walt was so young at the time of her passing, it could not be altered. Now that Walt is of age, I can transfer the name over, but he would then inherit the debts. As Abigail is an alpha, she would have to relinquish her name for him not to lose his name in the marriage. He does not want her to have to do this. He is also aware a dowry from you would pay for the debts on the estate and effectively merge the two estates again anyway, meaning his mother's legacy would be dissolved. She fought hard to keep Trap Estate going, and Walt feels he need to ensure it stays as she intended.

'He will only marry Abigail once he has earned enough money to do so. He has already achieved a permanent position at the law firm. He is intelligent and hard-working, so I know he will do it, but I also know it will take time. I do not think it is fair of him to ask Abigail, who has so many prospects, to wait for him.'

'I see,' Hannibal says. Will looks at the alpha, trying to read his expression, there is perhaps a small smile, but Will is unsure.

'I was hoping perhaps you might think of a solution that had not crossed my mind. Mostly I just wanted you to be aware of everything that was happening,' Will says. 'Firstly, would you even approve of their union?'

Hannibal places his glass down on the table and looks at Will. 'Of course, if it is what Abigail desires, then yes. You were right to bring this to me. There is a simple answer,' Hannibal says, and Will feels like a fool as he has not seen a solution. He was hoping that perhaps if Hannibal promised not to merge the estates and if Walt paid him back the dowry over a long

amount of time, an arrangement could be made to suit them all. He is pretty sure Hannibal does not care about money. He has enough of it.

‘There is?’

‘Yes,’ the alpha says. ‘We could marry.’

Chapter End Notes

comments are the piles of Will's clothes and kudos is the brandy in Hannibal's decantor!

Sorry to leave you on a cliffhanger! More next week!

The Dinner

Chapter Summary

Hannibal sighs. He was going to wait to suggest this until a few weeks had gone by. He was going to ease Will into the idea, make him slowly see how good they could be together.

‘Why not?’

Will runs a hand through his thick curls, and Hannibal is filled with envy at that hand. He longs to do the same. He imagines what the strands would feel like between his fingers. ‘I cannot just forget her.’

‘I am not asking you to,’ Hannibal stands up walks over to Will placing a gentle hand on his shoulder. ‘I know you will always love her. I am not asking for a bond. I am also not asking for an answer immediately. Think about it, talk with Walt, and I will speak with Abigail. I just ask you to not dismiss the idea out of hand.’

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal has never seen anyone look so shocked in his life. He wants to laugh, but he also knows if he did, Will would not react well at all. He has, in fact, been thinking about this for quite some time. Abigail and Walt were obviously getting closer, but Walt was pulling away. It did not take long for Hannibal to figure out why. He made enquiries into the financial situation of Trap Manor and Molly’s will, so he knew all that Will had just told him and more. The only solution he could see was that if he and Will married, Trap estate could stay in Will’s name as per Hannibal’s request. Will could move to Wolf Estate, then Abigail and Walt could live in Trap Estate if that was what Abigail wanted. This would mean his ward would remain close to Hannibal, which he wanted, and ensure that Trap Estate would remain viable until Walt was able to buy it back from Hannibal and Will. It also would also mean he could ensure Will remained part of his life.

‘I don’t understand,’ Will says.

‘Think about it. If we were married, then Trap Estate could stay with you, until as such time Walt can afford to buy it from you and I, he and Abigail could live there, raise a family there. Perhaps Walt could keep a place in the city or use this house but Abigail could move to Trap Estate, she would be close to me, and you could live at Wolf Manor with me. It solves all the problems.’

‘And creates some new ones,’ Will replies, his voice shaky.

‘It does?’

‘Well, how would it look us being married and our two respective wards being married. Wouldn’t that be a little strange?’

‘It would give people something to gossip about for a few months but they would soon get over it.’

‘You would be willing to marry me? An ex bonded, old omega?’

‘Of course, as I said to you, Will you have more to offer than you realise.’

‘It’s not that simple,’ Will says and stands up, walking towards the fire. ‘I can’t just marry you.’

Hannibal sighs. He was going to wait to suggest this until a few weeks had gone by. He was going to ease Will into the idea, make him slowly see how good they could be together.

‘Why not?’

Will runs a hand through his thick curls, and Hannibal is filled with envy at that hand. He longs to do the same. He imagines what the strands would feel like between his fingers. ‘I cannot just forget her.’

‘I am not asking you to,’ Hannibal stands up walks over to Will placing a gentle hand on his shoulder. ‘I know you will always love her. I am not asking for a bond. I am also not asking for an answer immediately. Think about it, talk with Walt, and I will speak with Abigail. I just ask you to not dismiss the idea out of hand.’

‘I would definitely need to speak to Walt before I could give you any answer.’

Hannibal smiles, as Will has not dismissed the idea out of hand. ‘Of course, however, I want you to think about it, just you. I want to know your answer.’

‘Why are you asking me?’ Will says and looks at Hannibal; there is a slight gold rim to Will’s eyes, faint, but it's there and it makes the alpha smile.

‘I am asking you to help solve the problem of Walt, and Trap Estate,’ Hannibal says hoping Will cannot see through his lie. It is no lie, it would solve the problem, but it is not the only reason. Of course, Hannibal knows Will is likely to run even further if he makes his move right now. This needs time.

‘Yes,’ Hannibal says. ‘No matter what you decide, I hope that we can remain friends, and I will do anything in my power to assist Walt and you with Trap Estate.’

Will turns away and stares into the fire. ‘I appreciate that.’

‘Just consider it, please?’

‘I can do that,’ Will answers. ‘I have a feeling it will be impossible for me not to.’

Hannibal laughs gently. ‘Well, for now, let’s just try and enjoy dinner.’

‘Perhaps do not mention to Bedelia what you just…proposed. I imagine she might have a heart attack.’

He gently hits Will on the shoulder. ‘She is not as scary as she comes across, I assure you, a pussy cat, really.’

‘I will have to take your word for that.’

‘You handled yourself very well earlier.’

Will looks at him and smiles. ‘I think I might need a minute. Can I meet you down there?’

‘Of course, take all the time you need.’

***

Hannibal leaves Will alone in his bedroom, already conscious of the fact that his chambers will now have Will’s scent in them when he comes to bed this evening. A thought that is both alluring and frustrating. He sighs as he gently closes the door behind him. Making his way down the steps and along the hall to the main staircase he can hear Abi’s bright laughter. He hopes that Bedelia will call the dogs off this evening, after her interrogation this afternoon. Hannibal cares a great deal about his cousin, and she has been there for him through thick and thin, but sometimes he wishes she would just be a little less mother lioness around Abigail.

With one last glance at the still closed bedroom door, he makes his way down the stairs to the reception room where Bedelia, Abigail, and Walt are all waiting for him. Chiyoh is serving glasses of punch romaine which makes Hannibal smirk as he enters.

‘At last, Papa, where have you been?’ Abigail says as she lunges towards him and takes his hand, leading him into the room. ‘Where is Will?’

‘Is he still having trouble deciding what to wear?’ Walt jokes. ‘Does he need some extra encouragement?’

Hannibal smiles and shakes his head. Not in that, no, Hannibal thinks. ‘I believe he is on his way down.’

‘I hope so,’ Bedelia says. ‘I hope he won’t keep us waiting long.’

Hannibal sighs again and gives his cousin a look, she raises her hand in defeat, and he nods his head.

‘Poor Will,’ Abigail says. ‘He is just not used to all this.’

‘I fear you may have overwhelmed him with the new wardrobe,’ Walt says with a smile.

‘It is nothing, he does not need to keep it all, but perhaps it will encourage him to be out in society a little more,’ Hannibal responds.

Walt laughs. ‘If you manage that, Hannibal, I will be impressed!’

‘We will all guide him while he is here, won’t we, Bedelia?’ Abigail says, giving her a look that Hannibal is impressed to see she has stolen from him.

‘Yes, yes, I get the hint! I shall be nicer,’ Bedelia says and smiles.

‘Thank you, Madame DuMaurier,’ Walt says. ‘Will has been through so much, and all of this is somewhat of a change for him.’

‘Please call me, Bedelia, as everyone is referring to everyone by their first names in this house. Why should I be any different!’

Hannibal laughs. ‘You will get used to it, cousin.’

Will appears then, at the door. His eyes dart around the room until they meet Hannibal’s, and he can see that the omega calms down. He makes his way towards him, gently placing a hand on the small of his back and guiding him into the room. Hannibal takes one punch romaine from the tray Chiyoh holds and gives the glass to Will, who eagerly takes it.

‘We were just talking about you,’ Hannibal says just to see the blush that colours Will’s cheeks.

‘Oh, I dread to imagine!’ Will says and takes a sip from the glass, licking his lips.

‘All good,’ Hannibal reassures him. ‘We were saying how we will all see you through the next few weeks, be here for you as allies.’

‘I do apologise if I came across as a little much this afternoon, dear Will,’ Bedelia says, floating towards him. ‘I am just very protective of those I care about.’

‘I feel the same way,’ Will responds, and Hannibal knows he is beaming, but he cannot help it. So proud of the way Will stands his ground.

‘Well, I am sure by the end of this evening, we will all be fast friends!’ Abigail says and smiles.

***

As much as Will was dreading it he cannot help but admit the food is, of course, delicious. The evening ends up being filled with laughter as Walt and Abigail manage to entertain everyone with their repartee. Will is filled with pride in his ward. The boy is growing up to become a truly impressive young man. Abigail is a perfect match for him. She is intelligent, funny and beautiful. His mother would have loved her. Will is happy for them to take centre stage as he mulls over Hannibal’s offer. The alpha is sat next to him and occasionally checks in on him with a slight touch of his knee or a squeeze of a hand. Every touch relaxes him more, putting him more at ease. It is a strange feeling and not one he has had since Molly.

This is even deeper, somehow, and he knows the connection between them is getting stronger.

As the evening draws to a close and they eat dessert, the conversation turns to the recent disappearance around the Wolf and Trap Estates. Bedelia asks Hannibal if he has heard any more about it, this illicit's a strange reaction in Hannibal, and Will can sense annoyance from him.

'No, nothing new as far as I know,' Hannibal says evenly.

'Will, you are friends with Detective Crawford, are you not? Has he told you anything?' Bedelia asks.

Will shakes his head. 'No, nothing new as far as I am aware. He asked me to keep an eye out for anything, but I was busy with Walt and obviously staying with Hannibal before that, unable to do very much of anything.'

'Of course, how silly of me. I just wonder at the soldier who went missing. In fact, wasn't he from the platoon that bothered Abigail all those months ago, when she and Walt first met?' Bedelia says, addressing this question to everyone except Hannibal and Will, once again, senses annoyance from Hannibal.

'I believe so,' Walt says.

'Gosh, I hadn't even thought of that!' Abigail says. 'He was hardly polite, but still, I do hope he is found safe and sound.'

'Perhaps this is a discussion left for another time. We wouldn't want to give Abigail bad dreams, cousin, would we?' Hannibal says, his voice a tone that causes a slight shiver to run down Will's spine.

'My apologies, cousin, it is getting late anyway I should take my leave. Walt, would you like to share a carriage with me?'

'Can't he stay here tonight, papa?' Abigail asks Hannibal.

'I am sure he has an early start in the morning, Abigail, it is important he gets to rest in his own rooms,' Hannibal responds.

'I would not want to impose, and as you say, I have a full day ahead of me. We will see each other at the opera, though,' Walt says, standing to follow Bedelia.

Will spies Abigail giving Walt a look and him shaking his head, as if to say, not now. He hopes they are not planning to sneak out to see each other.

At the door, he takes Walt aside, asking if he has time tomorrow before the opera to meet. They agree that Will can visit him at the club belonging to the firm for lunch to talk.

Once alone with Hannibal again, he suddenly feels nervous standing in the dimly lit hall. He is exhausted, but he also knows he will not sleep tonight, too much to think about. He sighs

and looks down at the tiled floor.

‘Will,’ Hannibal’s soft voice floats to his ears, and he looks up to meet those dark brown, reddish pools.

‘I am sorry, I am exhausted,’ Will admits with a smile as he runs a hand through his hair.

‘Come, have a nightcap with me, I insist. It will help you sleep,’ Hannibal says, and he can do no more than follow Hannibal upstairs to his room where they take their seats, once more, by the roaring fire. The alpha gets them a brandy each, and they sit in companionable silence, watching the flames dance in the grate.

‘Did you have a good evening?’ Hannibal asks.

‘Yes, yes, I have to admit it was lovely. Walt and Abigail do make quite the match,’ Will responds.

‘They do,’ Hannibal agrees.

‘I hope that you will be happy here for the next few weeks. I would like you to think of this as your home,’ Hannibal says.

Will is starting to feel as wherever Hannibal is might be his home, and that thought excites and terrifies him in equal measure. ‘I am not sure anywhere has ever really felt like home to me,’ Will admits. ‘Trap Manor was always Molly’s or Walt’s. I am just the caretaker now. My own home, when I was young, well that was never fixed.’

‘You don’t talk much about your past,’ Hannibal says.

‘Neither do you,’ Will points out. They have both been rather close-lipped about their lives before recent times. Will wonders why.

‘I suppose it is hard to. You can ask me anything you like,’ Hannibal says.

‘Do you have any family? Other than Bedelia?’

‘No, not anymore. Bedelia, too, is more of an adoptive cousin. Her family was close with my aunts as a girl. We were at school together.’

‘Your aunt brought you up?’ Will asks. He knows the answer is yes and that Hannibal’s parents and young sister perished when he was a boy. It is common knowledge, but Will does not know many of the details.

‘Yes. My parents died in the war, my sister and I were left with nothing and no one. She became very ill. She was always a frail child, she died shortly after my parents. It took some time for my aunt and uncle to find me. Once they did we moved from Europe to here. They supported me until I was old enough to make my own way. It is one of the reasons I admire Walt so much. He is like me. He has a strong need to make it on his own. I respect that.’

‘How old was your sister when she died?’

‘Young, she was around eight. I was a teenager, just before my thirteenth birthday. Her name was Mischa. She was very beautiful and bright for her age. I wonder what she would have become if she had lived.’

‘I am sorry, it must have been terrible.’

‘It is the past. I am where I am now, and that is all that matters to me.’

‘Can I ask you something else?’ Will says, finding a voice now, in the warmth and quiet of the room.

‘You may,’ Hannibal says.

‘Why have you never married? Bonded with anyone? You must have had many offers?’

‘How kind of you to say,’ Hannibal says and laughs.

Will rolls his eyes at Hannibal’s false modesty. ‘You don’t have to answer.’

‘I recently asked you to marry me. I think it would be incredibly rude of me not to answer! The main reason, if I am honest, is because I never felt a connection to anyone. Abigail came along and gave me an excuse to focus on her, but before that, I just never met anyone with who I could have imagined spending my life with.’

‘And now?’ Will asks, turning to look at Hannibal.

‘Now,’ Hannibal says, meeting Will’s gaze. ‘Things have changed. I don’t say that to pressure you; I just want to be honest. I have felt a connection to you from the moment we met. I want to explore that. I know that we could have something together, even if it is just a friendship. I cannot, now imagine my life without you.’

‘I have no idea why!’ Will says, unable to fathom what Hannibal sees him.

Hannibal reaches a hand over to Will’s and takes his palm in his. ‘I wish you would, I wish you would see what I see.’

‘All I see is a washed-up, old omega past his prime,’ Will laughs but stops when he feels Hannibal’s warm lips pressed against his knuckles.

‘I see an omega who has great potential still, great potential, and I hope I can show that to you.’

Will sighs. ‘You know Molly was the only other person I have ever been with.’

‘I know. That doesn’t matter to me. I am not looking for a physical relationship necessarily, though I do find you very handsome.’ Will blushes and watches as Hannibal smiles. The realisation that Hannibal likes it when Will blushes makes the blush even deeper. ‘You don’t need to reciprocate.’

‘I, I mean, of course, you are very…’ Will thinks and looks at Hannibal, asking himself what he feels when he looks at the alpha. ‘I don’t know what to say. This is all so new to me. I have not ever really been attracted to a male alpha before.’

‘Does that mean you are attracted to me?’ Hannibal says, and Will cannot help but note the hope in the alpha’s voice.

Will looks at the alpha, allowing his eyes to roam over Hannibal’s face, seeing the structure of it, the lines of his eyes, the deep brown almost red of his eyes. He thinks about being picked up by Hannibal, sharing a carriage with him, pressed up against him. Will had not allowed himself a chance to think about it, so caught up in other things, getting Walt ready and recovering from the accident. ‘I think, perhaps, yes,’ Will says and smiles.

Hannibal grins and kisses Will’s palm once more. ‘It’s a start then,’ Hannibal says.

Chapter End Notes

comments are Will's brown curls and kudos are the slight golden ring in the omega's eyes

The Escape

Chapter Summary

The carriage gently jostles will as Hannibal explains all the sights and sounds of the city. Sat next to Hannibal, their legs touching through the fabric of their breaches, Will is comforted by the warmth of the alpha's thigh so close to his own. Will has decided to do as Hannibal suggested and allow himself to be indulged. He puts all thoughts of Walt, Molly and Trap Estate behind him and just listens to Hannibal's voice. It's a glorious day, the sun is bright and high in the sky, and the city is gleaming. Everything seems to be shining. Will cannot help but smile. He cannot think of anywhere he would rather be and any company he would rather be in.

The morning seems to disappear quickly, and soon they have stopped the carriage at a local park. It is a huge area filled with massive trees and a lake in the middle. They find a grassy patch under a tree where Jimmy lays out a blanket and picnic for them. Will watches all the people as they sit, or walk, or play games of tennis or catch. Laughter fills the air around them, and everything seems picture perfect.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wakes up, and at first, he isn't sure where he is. Then he remembers, and he finds he's smiling. Hannibal proposed to him last night. Just when he thought this whole thing couldn't get more complicated, Hannibal had proposed to him. He laughs, and it sounds too loud in the room. He thinks of Molly's face and how she would have laughed at him being a lovesick omega. Lovesick, is that what he is? Love- that seems so unlikely, so far away from him it cannot possibly even be.

He thinks about Hannibal. He enjoys spending time with him. He enjoys their conversations —the ease which they have with one another. There is also tension there. He cannot deny it, a current of something. He has also noticed that since spending so much time with Hannibal, he has started to feel better. More like himself than he has in years. Waking up is less of an effort. His body aches less. Even his leg has healed much faster than it should. Every day it is less stiff. Surely that has to mean something?

Then he thinks about Walt. He needs to tread carefully. He knows that Walt has probably never entertained the idea that Will might re-marry. Walt doesn't like the idea of Will and Hannibal being together, but if it was an arrangement that could help his ward be with Abigail and save the Trap Estate, maybe it could work. Walt is starting on his journey, a journey where Will won't be needed for much longer. Where does that leave Will? If he's honest, he's surprised to have lasted this long. He began to think of himself as an elderly

grandparent who everyone expected to die any year. Every celebration referred to as their last.

Now, though, he is starting to feel young again, well, maybe not young, but less old. His heart is beating stronger in his chest. He wants to live. He could have many years ahead of him. Maybe with Hannibal.

There is a knock on the door, and he's glad of it. He needs to push all this away for the moment. Yes, he thinks, let's give it a few days to sort out how I feel, then I'll talk to Walt. There's no rush.

'Yes,' he shouts.

'Lord Graham?' Winston shouts from outside the door. 'May I enter?'

Will rolls his eyes at being called Lord. 'Yes, of course, Winston.'

Winston opens the door and enters the room. 'Good morning, Sir.'

'Good morning, Winston,' Will says, watching as his butler opens the curtains letting the sunlight stream into the room.

'Now, how is the leg? Do you need assistance?'

Will moves it and is surprised that apart from a small amount of stiffness, it seems fine. 'Much better, actually,' he says, moving the covers from him and swinging his legs over the bed to stand up. He stretches his arms and yawns. He is rested. He cannot remember the last time that happened.

'You seem cheerful this morning, Sir,' Winston remarks.

'I am feeling better,' he says and then frowns as he sees the chest of clothes still sprawled about. 'All of this mess makes me less so.'

'Do not worry, Sir, I will go through it all today while you and Count Lecter are out. I promise to have it all away before your return. I believe it is the opera this evening?'

Will grimaces. His good mood is already threatening to leave him. Several hours of sitting in a box listening to people warble is not his idea of fun. 'Yes, I believe so.'

'Sir, you never know,' Winston says, sensing his mood. Very few people know Will as well as his butler. 'You may enjoy it!'

Will frowns. 'You said that Count Lecter and I would be out for the day?'

'Oh yes, he has the entire day planned, I believe, starting with breakfast, so let's get you dressed.'

'What else does he have planned?'

'You will have to ask him, Sir.'

Will finds he is smiling again even as Winston starts to pull out something new and strange for him to wear.

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Will finds Hannibal reading a newspaper at the large dining room table when he enters the dining room. The alpha looks up at him, closing the paper and placing it down on the table.

'Good Morning, Will. I trust you slept well?' Hannibal asks, rising and guiding Will to a place already set next to his, and the alpha pulls out a chair for him. Chiyoh is standing in the corner, looking mortified at Hannibal's casualness.

'Yes, thank you,' he says, taking a seat. 'The best I have in a while.'

'That is good to hear. Breakfast?' Hannibal says, and Will nods, suddenly starving. 'Chiyoh, please bring us a plate.'

'Have I kept you waiting?' Will says, realising Hannibal has not eaten yet.

Hannibal shakes his head and retakes his seat as Chiyoh leaves the room.

'It is my pleasure to have breakfast with you,' Hannibal says, and Will laughs.

'If you say so,' Will says. 'Before Chiyoh returns, I wanted to say something.'

'Of course,' Hannibal says, all attention on Will.

'I wanted to wait to speak to Walt. Perhaps you, too, could wait to speak to Abigail, just until I have more of an idea about how I feel?'

Hannibal smiles, and Will is relieved. 'Yes. I think that makes sense. There is no rush, after all.'

'Last night, was, well I wanted to say, thank you, for everything. This trip, staying here, all the new clothes which, you should not have done, all if it, thank you.'

Hannibal leans forward and takes Will's hand in what is fast becoming a familiar gesture. 'I wanted to do something for you. I want you to feel looked after for once. You have spent so many years, I suspect, much of your life, taking care of others and now is the time to do something for yourself. Allow me to spoil you?'

Will wants to laugh, but then he looks up and sees that Hannibal is serious. The alpha is also right. Will has always taken care of other people. It is his whole life. Allowing Hannibal to take care of him, allowing himself to be indulged, is strange, yet, not unwelcome.

'I think you already have,' Will says, and Hannibal laughs.

'I am afraid we have a lot more planned. Today, for instance, we will be taking a tour of the city,' Hannibal says. 'I have a carriage for us, in case your leg is bothering you?'

Will goes to say that it is feeling better, then he realises that being in a carriage, close to Hannibal all day, is appealing. 'It is a little stiff.'

'Carriage it is then!' Hannibal says happily, and Will, once again, cannot help but smile.

***

The carriage gently jostles will as Hannibal explains all the sights and sounds of the city. Sat next to Hannibal, their legs touching through the fabric of their breaches, Will is comforted by the warmth of the alpha's thigh so close to his own. Will has decided to do as Hannibal suggested and allow himself to be indulged. He puts all thoughts of Walt, Molly and Trap Estate behind him and just listens to Hannibal's voice. It's a glorious day, the sun is bright and high in the sky, and the city is gleaming. Everything seems to be shining. Will cannot help but smile. He cannot think of anywhere he would rather be and any company he would rather be in.

The morning seems to disappear quickly, and soon they have stopped the carriage at a local park. It is a huge area filled with massive trees and a lake in the middle. They find a grassy patch under a tree where Jimmy lays out a blanket and picnic for them. Will watches all the people as they sit, or walk, or play games of tennis or catch. Laughter fills the air around them, and everything seems picture perfect.

'How long has it been since you have been to the city?' Hannibal asks, handing Will a glass of cold white wine.

'I think not since Molly and I would come in for events. I don't think I have ever really been here in the summer or enjoyed a day here,' Will says. He has seen a whole new side to the place. He's surprised that with Hannibal as his guide, he does not hate the crowd of people, the busyness, the pace. Instead, it actually leaves him a little exhilarated.

'Is your leg alright to sit on the ground?'

'Oh yes, it is feeling a lot better,' Will admits, and Hannibal smiles.

'Are you enjoying your time in the city more than you thought you would?'

'Yes,' Will relents. 'Today has been wonderful. I have seen a whole new side to the place.'

'I am glad. I do enjoy spending time here. Wolf Manor has its charms, but the city in late summer can be glorious, especially in such good company.'

Will tries to ignore the blush that he knows is colouring his cheeks. How Hannibal can make him feel like a young omega again, he has no idea.

'It is good to see you like this,' Hannibal says.

'How do you mean?'

'You are more relaxed than when I first met you, less burdened, you even look younger.'

Will laughs, but he has been thinking the same. 'I think, perhaps, you brought me out from under a rock I did not even know I was hiding under. I thank you for that, even though it cost me a broken leg.'

'Ah, yes, sorry about that,' Hannibal says.

'I think it was worth it,' Will says and smiles.

'I am glad you think so. Are you looking forward to the opera this evening?'

Will takes a sip of his drink and tries not to frown. 'I am unsure what to expect. I've never attended before.'

'I had suspected as much.'

'It is that obvious that I am so out of touch.'

'No, not all. I just think you may be pleasantly surprised.'

'Since I've met you, that seems to be happening more and more,' Will says and smiles.

Hannibal laughs. 'I hope it continues.'

'Me too,' Will says.

***

The afternoon had gone by too fast, bathed sunshine and small talk. Whiling away time was not something Will was used to, and yet with Hannibal, it never felt idle. It always felt as if there was nowhere else either of them had to be. They made it back to the house just as the sun was beginning to drop, not giving them much time to prepare for the opera. As the carriage pulled up, Will sees Alana standing at the window of the parlour, the moment she sees them, she rushes out of sight, and as Will gets out of the carriage, she is at the bottom of the steps.

'Will! You are back! I have been waiting!' she says, her voice is panicked, and she looks pale.

Hannibal appears at their side, putting his hand on Alana's arm. 'Are you alright, Lady Bloom? You look pale. Whatever has happened to cause you such distress?'

'Oh, I can barely find the words!' Alana says, tears now coursing down her pale cheeks.

'Lady, please, come inside and sit down, and then you must tell us what has happened,' Hannibal says and helps to lead her inside with Will closely following them. His mind races as to what this could be about. He has seen Alana feign distress many times, but this is genuine. She is as white as a sheet, and where is Margot?

They get her inside and settled on the chase. Chiyoh delivers some restorative tea, and Alana begins to calm down enough to speak to them.

'Where is Margot?' Will asks, unable to contain the question a moment longer, worried this is about her.

'She's there now, trying to find out where he might have gone,' she says.

The moment the words leave her mouth, Will knows it's Mason. Margot's brother has finally done it. The man has escaped. 'Mason?'

Alana nods and tries to fight back another round of tears as Will stands and paces the room. The relaxing warmth of the afternoon replaced with cold, stabbing fear.

'Lady Bloom,' Hannibal says, his voice a balm to Will, and he hopes to Alana too. 'Please just tell us what happened.'

Alana takes a deep breath and begins.

'We got the message this morning, but they think it happened sometime last night. He was there for the final checks in the evening, but he wasn't there when they went to his cell this morning. They searched the facility and grounds but couldn't find him. Hours had gone by, most of the day, before they finally sent someone to tell us. Margot went straight there to see what on earth and how on earth he might have done it. I came here. I brought Henry, he's playing with Abigail. I hope you don't mind Hannibal. I just wanted to see Will, and if I am honest, I was worried Mason might come after Henry. It is common knowledge where we live, and I just got so frightened!'

'Of course, I am glad you came. You can all stay for as long as you need. Margot too, I will send Jimmy to her, so she isn't alone. He is a fellow of great sense. He will accompany her back here and make sure she is safe,' Hannibal says and looks at Chiyoh, who nods. Hannibal puts his attention back on Alana. 'How are you feeling? I think you need some rest. Allow Chiyoh to get you settled in a room. Chiyoh, could you see to Lady Bloom, inform Jimmy of the situation. Ask Jimmy to go to Lady Verger right away and send one of the servants to check in on Abigail and Henry. Lock all the doors.'

'Oh, Hannibal, thank you so much!' Alana says, and Chiyoh helps her out of the chase, and they leave the room.

Will is looking out of the window at the darkening sky. He feels a hand on his shoulder and Hannibal's strong presence close to him.

'Are you alright?'

Will shakes his head and then looks at Hannibal. 'I am not sure. I wish we had never left the park.'

Hannibal smiles. 'All will be well. I fear we should stay in this evening, so you have a reprieve from the opera.'

'Oh Hannibal, I am sorry, it isn't fair all this has landed on your doorstep.'

'You have nothing to apologise for. You are all family to me, and I take care of those I love,' Hannibal says.

'Love?' Will says, a smiling threatening to curve his lips.

Hannibal takes Will's hand in his. 'Yes, I am afraid so. It's alright. You don't have to say anything. I just want you to know I will protect you and your family with my life. Which reminds me, we must make sure Walt is safe. Let me send someone to collect him. It would be best if you all stayed here with me until Mason Verger is found. You remain here a moment. I won't be long,' Hannibal says and leaves Will in a daze as the word "love" circles around his head, wanting to land and yet not quite finding solid ground.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are the glass of perfectly chilled white wine Hannibal hands Will, Kudos are all the times Hannibal takes Will's hand in his.

Thank you for reading lovely peeps xxxx

An Unexpected Heat

Chapter Summary

Will closes his eyes and thinks about love. Does he love Hannibal? Is that what this feeling is that boils in his body? Love? Then he realises with a wave of excitement and fear that it could be a heat. He has not had a heat for years. Even with Molly, they were small and manageable. He has never been much of an omega. He always thought of himself as a beta, which would explain how he survived the death of his alpha. That omegan biology never truly took root in himself. Now, he can feel it, deep inside, that fire, longing, burning through him. He feels a little damp. This cannot be happening. Not now, not after all these years. He is too old. He has no bond anymore.

This cannot be happening…

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the hiatus! We are back on track now so thought I would treat you to a chapter early. I will also be updating Sunday so look out for that!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Walt opens the door of his room slowly. Peeking out, he can see a small lamp lit at the end of the hallway casting shadows on the polished wooden floor. He listens. There is just the noise of the wind outside, a slight tapping of a loose frame somewhere, nothing else. All is quiet in the Lecter house. He opens the door a little more, stepping out and looking both ways down the hall. He steps outside his room, turns, carefully closing the door behind him.

When Jimmy appeared at his lodgings earlier, Walt had become convinced Hannibal knew the extent of his and Abigail's relationship and was summoning him. Jimmy had looked so harassed and unsure it had made Walt instantly nervous. When the servant then told him what had happened, he wished it was his first thought. Instead, Mason. When will the man not have influence over them? When his mother was alive, it was the same. The shadow of Mason constantly hanging over Alana and Margot. A bad spirit that wasn't actually dead, but everyone wished it was. If Walt could wave a magic wand, one of his wishes would be for Mason Verger to no longer be in this world.

He had met the man a few times when he was younger. Before Margot had him committed, Mason lived at the large estate in the city with her. When he and Molly would visit with Will, Mason would be loud and brash, always drinking. Molly warned him to stay away and never to be alone with Mason. Will was always there by his side, making sure that Mason would go

nowhere near his charge. At first, Walt had thought Mason was funny, always making rude jokes and talking in strange voices that made him laugh. Then one afternoon, Walt had run out to the stables. He always liked to see the horses. Somehow Mason had followed him there. Walt was young at the time, so doesn't remember much, but it was the feeling, the way he had been unmoored, upset, confused, and so relieved when Will came barrelling in, scooped him up in his arms and whisked him out of the stable so fast Walt was not even sure it had happened.

Walt had also seen what Margot was like around Mason, how the Aunt he knew as vibrant and fun was so diminished in his presence. She was reduced around him, and even though Walt did not fully understand why, he understood that he did not like to see her that way. Eventually, they stopped going to the estate, and it was only once Mason was locked up they went back.

Walt pushes the memories away and focuses on his task. He needs to see Abigail, but he cannot get caught. He knows there are servants in the hallway downstairs, so he has to be extra quiet. He thinks he hears a voice downstairs and stops for a moment to listen, pressing himself against the wall and shadows. It sounds like the Count, but he can't be sure, probably just checking everyone is alert and on watch. Mason wouldn't come here, Walt doesn't think, he would not know the connection between them all, surely? Walt hopes not anyway.

The voices have quietened down, so Walt carefully makes his way past Will's room and further down to the second staircase leading upstairs to where Abigail is staying. Alana, Margot and Henry are also on this floor in the far rooms. He manages to make his way up with no trouble and no more noises. He finds Abigail's room and gently knocks on the door.

'Abi,' he whispers into the wood panelling.

After a few moments, he hears footsteps and sees the handle turn. The door opens to reveal his love, smiling. She opens the door, and he slips inside. Before he can even say a word, she presses herself against him in a tight embrace. He breathes in the scent of her and feels every part of him simultaneous calm and burn with desire. This is the effect she always has on him.

'Walt, I am so glad you came,' she whispers into his neck.

'I had to see you,' he says.

She looks up at him, her pale skin luminous in the moonlight spilling in from the window. 'Is it that bad? This Mason? Is he really that awful?'

Walt strokes a gentle hand down her face, her skin as soft as a peach. 'He is a nasty piece of work, I'm afraid. He harbours nothing but resentment and hate for dear Margot, it took her years to be rid of him, but he always somehow manages to return and cause trouble for all of us. I am sure we will be safe here, though. I doubt he knows the connection, and Hannibal has us locked up tight.'

Abigail smiles, but it does not reach her eyes. Walt kisses her gently. He knows she understands better than most what dangerous men can be like. They part, and he smiles. 'I

promise you everything will be all right. They have every man looking for him.' Walt says. 'I daren't stay long, but I just wanted to see you.'

'Please, sit with me for a while?' Abi says and Walt can never resist her sweet smile, so he allows himself to be led to her bed, where they both sit. She is wearing her nightgown with a shawl hastily covering her shoulders, and her bare arms shine, her warm brown hair hangs down her back.

'I have never seen Margot like that before. She was as white as sheet and Alana too!'

Walt takes her hand, their fingers interlace. 'I know, Margot is always such a force, but when it comes to Mason, she can so easily come undone. He is brute, to be sure.'

'Poor Margot,' Abi says, and Walt smiles.

'You are always thinking of others,' Walt says.

'You have all become like family these past few months. I don't have any aunts or uncles or cousins or anyone really. Hannibal and I are alone with each other. So it has been so wonderful to become a part of your family. I hope you feel that way too?'

'You know I do, Abi, of course. I hope that soon we can make it official. I do so want to marry you. I just need you to wait for a little longer.'

'I will wait for as long as you need Walt. You know that, there is no one else for me.'

Walt smiles and kisses her once more. 'I should go. I don't want Hannibal to find me here, after everything he has done to keep us safe. I thought I heard him earlier, so he might come and check on you.'

Abigail looks as if she is going to protest but stops herself. 'All right, I will see you tomorrow?'

'Of course, we can have breakfast together,' Walt says, standing. He kisses her hands and then quietly leaves her.

The house is still silent, the gentle chiming of a clock lets Walt know it's past midnight, and he makes his way down the steps back to his room. As he passes Will's room, he hears the door creak open, and he winces.

'I thought that was you,' Will says and grabs him pulling him inside and closing the door. 'You should not be sneaking around!'

'I know, I know!' Walt says. 'I just wanted to see Abi.'

'What if Hannibal had caught you?' Will says, clearly exasperated. 'You need to be more careful, he knows you and her are close, but he would not approve of you sneaking to her room at night. Neither do I, for that matter. Her reputation is important too.'

‘You’re right, you’re right. It won’t happen again,’ Walt promises, after all, if he needs to keep in Hannibal’s good graces if he and Abigail are to marry.

‘Go to bed!’ Will says, but his guardian is smiling as Walt leaves.

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Will closes the door behind Walt and listens to the boy’s footsteps making their way back to his room. He needs to talk to Walt about everything that is happening, especially Hannibal’s admission earlier, but there is just so much going on. He makes his way to the window, unable to sleep, too much on his mind, and if he is honest, he misses the open skies and gardens of Trap Manor. He always found the space soothing when stressed. Now he feels penned in as he looks out onto other houses, carriages going by and people walking by even at this late hour. He is not used to so much activity so late at night.

He knows everyone is safe here. Mason cannot get to them. In fact, they are safer here than in the country where there are so many more places to hide. Will just wishes he could feel safe. His mind wanders to Hannibal, and he has a flash of crawling into bed with the alpha, breathing in that comforting scent. He shakes his head. No, he needs to stay focused. This is all moving too fast. The most important thing is Walt, and how he feels about all this, he cannot allow himself to become attached before he has a chance to speak to Walt about it. Nothing can happen until this mess with Mason is over. He can’t do anything about it right now. So he may as well attempt to sleep.

Yet sleep does not come as he lies in the soft cocoon of the bed. He knows he should be worried about Mason, about Margot, Alana and Henry, Walt and Abigail, all of it. Yet, his mind only wants to replay one thing. Hannibal saying “love”. The tone of the word as it left the alpha’s lips, slipping out, smooth as silk. As if that word did not carry weight, as if it did not sink to the depths of Will and hollow him out. Hollowing him out but replacing and filling at the same time. Replacing that broken, shattered cavern of his heart with something he has not felt in such a long time, he wonders now if he ever has, longing- soul aching, heart-stopping, longing.

He longs for Hannibal in his bones, in his sinews, in the still-beating muscles of his heart. His veins ache for the alpha, his blood boils and churns inside him for Hannibal. Closing his eyes, he can see Hannibal’s face, those sharp cheekbones, dark eyes, hair that changes colour depending on the light but always gleaming, his hands, veins lacing their way under his tanned skin, his voice soft and calming. Everything about the alpha, Will wants. The thought is terrifying.

He closes his eyes and thinks about love. Does he love Hannibal? Is that what this feeling is that boils in his body? Love? Then he realises with a wave of excitement and fear that it could be a heat. He has not had a heat for years. Even with Molly, they were small and manageable. He has never been much of an omega. He always thought of himself as a beta, which would explain how he survived the death of his alpha. That omegan biology never

truly took root in himself. Now, he can feel it, deep inside, that fire, longing, burning through him. He feels a little damp. This cannot be happening. Not now, not after all these years. He is too old. He has no bond anymore.

This cannot be happening…

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Will is still awake as the morning light begins to spill in through the curtains he eventually shut last night, hoping it would help him sleep. The whole night was restless. He tossed and turned, his mind would not let him rest, and his body was so hot he threw the covers from himself. Now with the sunlight spilling in, he groans and shivers a little, now cold. He hopes it was just a fever last night and nothing more. Surely it was just the stress and worry of everything that is happening. He was just getting ahead of himself. He is not able to go into heat. He knows that in the morning light and laughs at himself for even entertaining the idea.

There is a soft knock at the door. He wonders at the time. It must still be early, the sun only just rising.

‘Will?’ it is the Count. He would recognise that voice anywhere. ‘Are you awake?’

He sighs as he realises he is a mess. Getting out of bed, he grabs a robe and covers his sweat-dampened nightgown, throwing the coverlet back over the bed in the hopes Hannibal will not notice the remnants of his fever. He makes his way to the door and opens it a crack.

‘Hannibal? What time is it?’

‘Early, did I wake you?’

‘No, I didn’t sleep,’ Will admits.

‘Would you mind if I came in? I know it’s early, and I’ve caught you off guard,’ Hannibal says. ‘I just wanted to talk before everyone woke up.’

Will smiles and thinks they are behaving just the same as Abigail and Walt, sneaking around. ‘Of course, sorry, I am a bit of a mess. As I said, I didn’t sleep.’

Will opens the door and allows Hannibal in. The Count is fully dressed, if Will is not mistaken, in the same clothes as yesterday, other than slight dark circles under his eyes though he looks as handsome and fresh as he always does. ‘Did you sleep?’ Will asks.

Hannibal runs a hand through his perfectly quaffed hair as Will closes the door and then turns to face the alpha. ‘No. I wanted to make sure we were all safe.’

‘Any news?’ Will asks hopefully.

‘No, not yet,’ Hannibal responds. ‘I just wanted to check in on you, and I am glad I did. Are you all right? You look flushed.’ Hannibal moves closes, placing his palm on Will’s forehead, a touch he tries not to lean into.

‘I was a little feverish in the night,’ Will explains. ‘It was probably all the worry.’

‘Hmm,’ Hannibal says and seems to sniff the air.

‘Did you just smell me?’

Hannibal smiles. ‘Difficult to avoid. You are a little warm still,’ Hannibal says and removes his hand. ‘I will get your sheets changed, and then you should try to get some rest.’

Standing here with Hannibal so close, Will’s body is beginning to burn up again. He can feel his legs trembling, and he worries he might fall. The Count seems to sense this and ushers Will to sit on the edge of the bed. ‘You need to rest.’

‘That may be difficult with everything going on,’ Will says as Hannibal once more places his palm against his Will’s forehead.

‘You need to keep your strength up; everything is in hand, you do not need to worry.’

‘I know, I know that, I think….’ Will cannot continue that thought. It might swallow him whole.

‘What is it? What’s wrong?’ Hannibal says, but Will can see a ghost of a smile on the alpha’s lips, and he knows that the Count is well aware of what is happening. The look confirms Will’s fears. The alpha can smell it.

‘I think you know,’ Will says, hoping the floor will open up and swallow him whole. ‘I had no idea it was even a possibility anymore.’

‘A heat?’ Hannibal says evenly. ‘You think you may be experiencing one?’

‘Early stages, yes, but as I said, I had no idea it was possible. It could just be the stress of everything. I will have Winston mix up some tonic for me, and I am sure it will pass.’

Hannibal removes his hand from Will’s forehead and picks up Will’s hand. The alpha looks down at their hands for a moment and then looks back up at Will. His eyes are sparkling, and it makes Will nervous.

‘Of course, you could do that. I could obtain everything you need,’ Hannibal says. ‘If that is what you want?’

Will stills and cannot believe that Hannibal is saying what he thinks the alpha is saying. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, you could see what happens. I could… help you… if you wanted?’

‘Help me?’

‘Yes, I could be with you for it, I would like to be… if you want me to be?’

Will is floored, terrified and excited, and terrified again. He has never been with a male alpha, and not during a heat. He was just getting his head around the idea of being with a male alpha, but this would be so…intimate. ‘I… I … don’t…I mean… we aren’t bonded…its not…proper….’ Will manages.

‘Will,’ Hannibal says, squeezing his hand tightly, caressing the side of Will’s face with his other hand. ‘None of that matters. The only thing that matter is what you want.’

‘It’s more complicated than that,’ Will says as his mind cannot help but go to Walt.

Hannibal sighs, and it makes Will scared he has upset the man. ‘Will, when was the last time you did something for yourself? Just for you? Thought of no one but yourself?’

‘Hannibal…’

‘No, Will, you have spent your whole life putting the needs of others ahead of your own. Molly, Walt and from what you have told me of your childhood, that was short, and you grew up fast. You have never allowed yourself to be happy, to choose something for you.’

‘I chose Molly,’ Will says, defensive now. He had loved his wife. He had chosen to be with her.

‘You saved her,’ Hannibal says. ‘You saved her from a terrible marriage and then looked after her when she was sick. You looked after Walt. You never allowed yourself to do what you wanted to do.’

‘Hannibal, it’s not that simple. I loved Molly, and I love Walt. You understand that. Look at you and Abigail. You saved her.’

‘I did, but I did that because I wanted to. I was not obliged to.’

‘I was not obliged to save Molly or marry her,’ Will says. ‘It is more complicated than you know.’

‘Will, I am not saying this to upset you or diminish your marriage or relationship with Walt. You should be proud of what you have accomplished, but now, you need to think about your own future. Walt is well on his way to becoming a man. He will not need you forever, and then what will happen? You are allowed to be happy, to choose something, someone, just for you.’

Will wants to be angry; he wants to shout at Hannibal, tell him that the alpha has it all wrong, that Will has made his own choices all these years, but there is a kernel of truth that stings him.

‘Hannibal, it’s not just that easy…I’ Will stumbles over his words, and he wishes this was easier.

‘All I want is you. Nothing more. Let me help you, let me make you feel good, I can promise you that.’

Will looks at Hannibal, his face filled with hope, and Will cannot understand how he has managed to find himself here in this room with this improbable alpha. ‘Why?’ he asks.

Hannibal smiles and looks at Will. ‘You are beautiful, Will, inside and out. You cannot see it, but I can. You are so much more than you believe, and I want you to see it. I want to help you see it. If you let me, think about it?’

‘This is just all… it’s too much….’ Will says as his mind begins to close down again, his thoughts swirl around, sinking down and down.

‘I don’t mean to pressure you. If I see you through your heat, there is still no obligation to marry me,’ Hannibal says. ‘I hope you will, but if you don’t want that, I will understand.’

‘None of this makes any sense,’ Will says, shaking his head. He can feel panicked laughter bubble up from inside him.

‘Yes, it does. It makes perfect sense,’ Hannibal says and leans in closer, placing a chaste kiss on Will’s forehead. ‘We are meant to be, Will. You just need to allow yourself to feel it.’

Chapter End Notes

Comments are Walt and Abi's sweet kisses, kudos is Walt's lovesick smile.

see you Sunday xxx

A Body

Chapter Summary

He daren't close his eyes, the image of Mason's mauled face still too close to the surface. His fingers twitch when he thinks about it. He knew Mason was murdered the moment he saw the body. He could sense the imprint of the emotion behind it. He can also feel his heat. The rumblings of it are once again rearing up. He looks at his dresser, where Winston has left him some tonic. He could take it now. It would numb some of what he's feeling. Then he thinks about Hannibal's hand on his forehead, his offer to be with Will during his heat. His mind is a storm, and he wants to grab onto Hannibal for some security, a moor, anything. Then he thinks of Molly, her gentle smile, her laugh, her grace in death, and he feels a wave of guilt wash over him. His hand goes to his pocket, where he still keeps the picture of his mate. He takes it out and looks at the faded painting. He thinks of Walt, too, everything the young man has had to overcome. Then Hannibal's words, when was the last time he just thought of himself? Has he ever?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the time Will makes it downstairs, Winston had thankfully helped wash the remnants of his fever, helped him dress and calmed him down. The servant had also promised to have some tonic by the afternoon to prevent any further symptoms. Will has not mentioned to Winston that he had not decided whether he would take it. Finally dressed and somewhat calmer, he finds Alana and Margot pacing in the parlour while Abigail and Walt teach Henry some chords on the piano. Hannibal is sat on the couch reading this morning papers as if nothing at all is happening.

'Will!' Alana says as she sees him, throwing her arms around him. 'Hannibal said you were sick! Why aren't you resting?'

Hannibal puts down the paper and looks at Will. 'My thoughts exactly,' the Count says and ushers Will to sit down. 'Have you eaten?'

Will sits down next to Hannibal and nods. 'Yes, Winston brought me some food,' Will had not felt like eating it but had managed some toast.

Hannibal rings the small bell, and a few moments later, Chiyoh appears, her stern but beautiful face looking serene and unruffled as ever. 'Tea for Lord Graham, Chiyoh, thank you,' Hannibal says, and Chiyoh nods before leaving the room. The Count places a hand on Will's forehead and frowns. 'You are still a little warm. You should be resting.'

'I am fine. I am sorry I wasn't here earlier, is there any news?' Will asks, looking at Alana and Margot, both pale with worry.

'No,' Margot says and takes a seat opposite Will. 'We survived the night thanks to Hannibal. I am sure Mason has no idea we are here.'

'It is my pleasure,' Hannibal replies.

'How did he get out?' Will asks. 'Do we know?'

Margot clasps her hands together and leans forward. 'Bribed one of the guards, promised him money that Mason does not have, but how was the guard to know that! All he hears is the Verger name, and that's enough.'

'I thought they vetted the guards?' Will says. 'The amount you have given the institution over the years, you would expect better!'

'Well, the guard has been relieved of his position, but I suppose there are always some who slip through the cracks, and you know how persuasive Mason can be,' Margot says. 'I am just so glad that Henry is safe.' Her eyes slide to the boy at the piano as he giggles and bangs the keys.

'You are all welcome for as long as is needed,' Hannibal says.

'Thank you so much, Hannibal. I cannot put into words how much it means to us,' Alana says as she takes a seat next to Margot. 'Abigail is just wonderful with Henry. I think they are becoming firm friends.'

Hannibal smiles as he looks over at the three by the piano. Abigail is glowing as the little boy laughs and giggles.

'She is a natural with children,' Hannibal says.

Chiyoh reappears with a tray of tea, which she carefully places on the table before straightening and announcing. 'My lord, Detective Crawford is at the door. There has been a development.'

They all stare at her in disbelief. Margot looks even paler.

'You all stay here. I shall go and see what has happened,' Hannibal says, standing. Will gets up too.

'I'll come with you,' he says, and Hannibal nods his approval.

Detective Crawford looks serious. Actually, the most serious Will has ever seen him.

'Master Graham,' Jack says. 'I asked for Margot.'

'I'm here,' a voice from behind them says, and they turn to see Margot had followed them out. She gracefully steps in front of them. Will takes her hand, and she squeezes it. 'Please,

Detective Crawford, what has happened?'

'You may want to sit down,' he says.

'Please just tell me,' she says firmly.

'As you wish, well early this morning, we think we found your brother,' Jack says, and Margot squeezes Will's hand so hard he thinks she might break it.

'Where was he?' she asks.

'In the woods near Trap Manor, he was heading back towards the city,' Jack says.

'Where is he now?' Will asks.

'You misunderstand. We are not sure it's him,' Jack clarifies.

'I don't understand,' Margot says.

'He was not alive,' Hannibal asks.

'Indeed, Sir, we found a body that fits Mason's description, but we cannot be sure it's him.'

'What do you mean?' Margot says, and Will can feel her trembling through his hand.

'He, his body was badly… well… excuse me ma'am but mauled,' Jack says.

'Mauled?' Margot asks.

'Yes, at first we thought an animal, maybe a bear as it's rare, but they have been known to wander in those woods, or a wolf maybe. As you know, there has been a spate of disappearances in the area that we had thought were animal attacks, but on closer examination, we are not sure what has happened.'

'Detective, please explain,' Hannibal says.

'Well, the bite marks all seem different, as if they belong to several different animals. Now, as far as we know, bears and wolves would never hunt together. The expert we have cannot make heads nor tails of it; he says he has never seen anything like it. We are not sure what happened, but we are also fairly sure it's him, but we need someone to identify the body.'

'I can do it,' Margot says, her voice much stronger than her trembling hand would imply.

'I will come with you,' Will says.

'I will come too,' Hannibal says, stepping closer to Will.

'You don't have to,' Margot says. 'You have done enough.'

'I insist I come with you both. Alana and Abigail can stay here with Henry; I am sure Walt will be happy to supervise for a little longer,' Hannibal says.

'It shouldn't take long, ma'am, and I would advise you to bring someone with you. It is not a pretty sight, especially for a lady,' Crawford says, and Will feels Margot squeeze his hand again.

'I can assure you I have seen worse,' she says. 'I have lived around slaughtered animals my entire life, and my father and brother were not shy about showing me the more gruesome aspects of the business.'

'Well,' Crawford replies, a little shocked. 'Still, safety in numbers.'

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Hannibal organised carriages for himself, Will and Margot. She still looked pale as a ghost, and Will was not much rosier as they all climbed inside. Hannibal had made sure to pay extra attention to Will. He had, of course, known this was going to happen. Hannibal had used his quarry one last time to his advantage. He had been tempted to do the deed himself, his stores were getting a little low, but he didn't want to risk the connection.

Randall Tier, an old patient of his, has been hunting in the woods near Wolf Manor since they moved in. A particularly difficult quarry for Hannibal as the man goes to ground better than the animals he imitates. The soldier, who had bothered Abigail, was, of course, removed by Hannibal. He had fed part of him to Will when they first came to stay. The irony, as well as the meat, had been delicious. Last night he rode out and found Mason as he was making his way back into the city, herding him into the woods by chasing him. It had not taken long for Randall to find him. Once finished, Hannibal had simply moved the body to where Crawford and his men were sure to find it. He would deal with Randall once he was back at Wolf Manor.

For now, his focus is on Will. He wants to see how the omega will react to seeing Mason Verger, savaged and dead. He knows that Will killed Molly's first husband, he had researched the case shortly before moving to Wolf Manor, and it was clear to him that Jack Crawford had helped Will cover it up. Most likely, because it was a bonus to everyone that the man was dead, Francis Dolarhyde had been nothing but trouble to the area for years, violent to Molly, often causing trouble in the village too. Will had met Molly and Francis through Margot and Alana. Shortly after this meeting, Dolarhyde had been found drowned in a river after, what the report said, a night of drinking. Hannibal had seen the report. Francis was badly beaten. The moment he met Will, he knew what the omega was capable of when threatened. It was obvious it was Will who had killed the man. The darkness in him shone through. Hannibal recognised it.

Admitting his feelings to Will had been risky, but he wants Will to go into heat. He needs to remind the omega of his biology. It seemed a good way to force the issue. He does love Will. As much as a man like himself is able, he recognises Will as an equal, and that is the first time he has ever encountered anyone who comes close. He needs Will to bond with him, hunt with him and share his life. Right now, he needs to remain focused.

They arrive at the police station after a silent carriage ride, and Hannibal helps both Will and Margot out of the carriage before they all follow Detective Crawford to the morgue. They are led to the basement, a cold maze of corridors, finally to a door at the end of the hall.

Detective Crawford stops and turns to them all. 'Margot, are you sure you can do this?' he asks.

Will turns to her. 'Let me go in. I can identify him,' Will says and then turns to Jack. 'Is that alright?'

Crawford nods.

'I'll go in with you, Will,' Hannibal says. 'If Margot, you can are alright to stay here for a moment.'

'I can get someone to stay with you,' Crawford says.

Margot closes her eyes briefly. 'I will be fine, yes Will, if you can go in. I think a moment to myself would be good.'

'It won't take long,' Crawford says, leading her to a nearby bench where she takes a seat.

All three go inside the small, cold room with a table with a sheet covering the body. Crawford makes his way to one side of it as he and Will move closer. He hangs a little back, watching.

'Are you ready?' Crawford asks, and Will nods.

The Detective pulls back the sheet to reveal the very mangled body of Mason Verger. He can see Will has barely changed colour or made any new expression. Hannibal stifles a smile. 'Yes, that's him,' is all Will says.

Hannibal takes a step closer and takes Will's hand in his own. A steady hand.

'Are you sure?' Crawford asks.

'Yes, that's him,' Will says, voice as calm as ever. Hannibal can sense a steeliness, though, and slight contentment coming from the omega as if Will is pleased.

'I think that's all you need,' Hannibal says, and Crawford covers the body once more.

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Will had excused himself once back at the house, his body was wrecked, and he just needed a moment to himself. Margot, Alana and Henry had all gone home, needing, also, to be at home. Walt had left to go to work, and Abigail had gone to Bedelia's needing a change of scenery, Will suspected she was also going to meet Walt. Hannibal had dealt with the rest of the paperwork at the station, sending Margot and him on ahead. Will was grateful for that, as

his mind was too fogged to deal with any of it. He closes the door to his room and lies down on the bed.

He daren't close his eyes, the image of Mason's mauled face still too close to the surface. His fingers twitch when he thinks about it. He knew Mason was murdered the moment he saw the body. He could sense the imprint of the emotion behind it. He can also feel his heat. The rumblings of it are once again rearing up. He looks at his dresser, where Winston has left him some tonic. He could take it now. It would numb some of what he's feeling. Then he thinks about Hannibal's hand on his forehead, his offer to be with Will during his heat. His mind is a storm, and he wants to grab onto Hannibal for some security, a moor, anything. Then he thinks of Molly, her gentle smile, her laugh, her grace in death, and he feels a wave of guilt wash over him. His hand goes to his pocket, where he still keeps the picture of his mate. He takes it out and looks at the faded painting. He thinks of Walt, too, everything the young man has had to overcome. Then Hannibal's words, when was the last time he just thought of himself? Has he ever?

When he killed Molly's husband, he had done it for her, but he also did it for himself. He could no longer deny it. He was also sure that Hannibal could sense this. Jack had not investigated it, he knew the kind of man Dolarhyde was, and he was happy not to have him around anymore, causing trouble. There was no body. No crime had been committed, just a missing person, presumed dead. After all, the man had done it before, drunk too much and wandered off. Who was to say he hadn't just done the same?

He rarely allows himself to think of the night. The sight of Mason's mangled body had brought up the memories, the feeling of having that much power over another being, of snuffing out the life they had no right to. Francis had been cruel. Molly and he both knew that it was only a matter of time until the omega harmed Walt. Will would not allow that to happen. He had followed Francis after a night in the tavern. He had followed him, intending to kill him. Francis was a much bigger omega than Will. To have a chance, he needed to wait for the man to be intoxicated. It was a cold night too. Francis had been staggering and weak leaving the tavern. Will had followed him, waited until the omega was close enough to the woods, covered by darkness, Will had attacked him. It was a brutal attack. Will had used nothing but his fists, his quiet rage more than enough to overpower him. Eventually, a few well-placed blows to the head with a rock was all that was needed to finish him off. He and Molly had moved the body where no one would find it. She had waited for him, and her eyes had widened when she saw the state of him. They never spoke of that night again.

Now he lies here, and his mind is filled with thoughts of it as his heart becomes stronger. There is a soft knock on the door. Will knows immediately that it's Hannibal. He stands up, placing the picture of Molly in a drawer before going to the door.

'Will?' Hannibal's voice asks. 'Are you awake?'

Will smiles and takes a deep breath before opening the door. 'Yes,' he says and allows Hannibal inside, closing the door behind him.

'Are you alright?' the alpha says, reaching for Will's hand.

Will looks down at their entwined hands, his body relaxes, and his mind finally clears. 'Now, yes.'

Hannibal smiles. 'I was worried about you; I was as fast as I could be.'

'Thank you for everything,' Will says and looks up at the alpha. His eyes are darker now, red almost black. He can smell the strong scent of red wine and musty paper. It makes him ache.

'You never have to thank me,' Hannibal says. 'Your heat, it's still coming on?'

Will smiles and looks away at the unopened bottle of tonic on the side. 'Yes, I didn't take anything, not yet. I didn't have time, and then I was thinking….'

Will feels the gentle pressure of a finger on his chin, moving his face back to look at that alpha. 'You are considering?'

'Yes, I was considering your offer, but with everything that has happened… it's not appropriate….'

'As I said to you before, Will, the only thing that matters is how you feel.'

'I wish it were that simple,' Will says as his body leans towards Hannibal's touch.

'It is. What do you want? Right now. What do you need?'

He knows, at this moment, what the answer to that question is. It is written in his bones, heart, muscles, and the very marrow of his being. 'I think… I want… I want to kiss you….'

Before Will can even react to what is happening, Hannibal has moved the hand on his chin to the back of his neck, grabbing and pulling Will towards him, so their bodies are flush together and devouring Will in a bruising kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, you will have to wait until next week for all the smut. I do mean all. the. smut. !!!

Comments are Will's words wanting nothing more than to be kissed by Hannibal and kudos are, you guessed it, that bruising kills between them xxx

A Heat Haze

Chapter Summary

Will smiles, biting his lower lip, as he inhales the scent of Hannibal, enjoying the way their bodies seem to fit together so perfectly. Hannibal mirrors his smile, fangs on show, eyes gleaming. The alpha leans forward and kisses Will softly on the lips.

‘I haven’t ever been with a male alpha… not even during a heat…if that’s what this is,’ Will says suddenly shy, he looks down and away again.

‘Will,’ Hannibal says, drawing Will’s gaze back to those glittering eyes. ‘None of that matters. We can take it slow, as slow as you like. It is a heat. I can smell it.’

‘How slow?’ Will says, leaning closer.

Hannibal reaches up and runs a hand through Will’s hair, tugging slighting, it makes Will whimper again. ‘As slow as you want,’ the alpha says.

‘Kiss me, kiss me and then we’ll see,’ Will says. Hannibal smiles, but Will barely has time to acknowledge it before he is devoured once more in a kiss. This time, Hannibal pushes Will away from the door until the back of his legs hit the bed, he stumbles, but Hannibal holds him upright. They part, and Hannibal strokes Will’s cheek.

Chapter Notes

Are you ready? Here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will’s body reacts immediately, and he soon finds himself lost in the embrace. Every nerve now burning, there is nothing but this, Hannibal’s lips, tongue and hands, their bodies pressed up so close, barely a millimetre is between them. He moans into the kiss, but he doesn’t care. Hannibal’s reaction is to pull him closer, which only makes Will whimper more as if he was a young omega again. Will pushes Hannibal back, so the alpha hits the door with a thump, pressing ever closer.

For a moment, Will comes to his senses and parts from Hannibal. ‘We can’t do this!’ he says, but he doesn’t mean it. He hopes that Hannibal knows this.

‘Yes, yes we can. Everyone is out; I told the servants not to disturb you as you were resting. We can take as long as you need. It’s just you and I,’ Hannibal says and strokes a hand down Will’s face before gently kissing him this time. It is so slow and tender it makes Will ache even more. ‘Please, Will, let us be together. There is only us, here, now. Nothing else matters.’

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‘You are so beautiful, Will Graham. It takes my breath away,’ the alpha says with no trace of humour, and it makes Will blush. ‘Especially when you blush.’

‘I was getting the feeling you liked to see me blush,’ Will replies and laughs.

‘Indeed I do,’ Hannibal says. ‘I would like to see more.’ Hannibal traces a soft finger down Will’s neck, loosening the knotted cravat. ‘Just how far down this neck does that flush go?’

Will’s legs are weak now, trembling as Hannibal undoes the cravat fully and traces a line on his exposed skin. He leans his head back to allow Hannibal more access. Then the alpha begins to place soft, chaste kisses all along his skin. If it wasn’t for the strong arm around his waist Will is sure he would fall on the bed. ‘Please,’ Will moans. His mind is beginning to fog now, arousal burgeoning in his body.

‘My beautiful Will, let me undress you, lay you on this bed and kiss you,’ Hannibal whispers into Will’s neck, every word accompanied by a soft kiss.

‘Yes, Hannibal, please,’ he whimpers as his eyes roll back in his head, all control slipping from him.

Apparently needing little encouragement, Hannibal pushes the waistcoat off Will’s shoulders which joins the cravat on the floor before untucking Will’s shirt from him and removing it completely, pulling it over Will’s head. Soon he is standing in just his breeches, bare chest

exposed, Hannibal's eyes roaming up and down his chest, the flush making its way down the column of his neck to his chest. The alpha smiles and continues to kiss the exposed skin. Will can hear the moans and whimpers escaping his lips, but he doesn't seem to care, all he cares about is the soft brushing of Hannibal's lips, and the occasional lick as the alpha gets lower. A tongue is softly dragged across his nipple, and he whines, which seems only to encourage Hannibal to do it again. Then there is sucking, a graze of teeth and a soft pressing of lips. It is all Will can do to stay upright.

Hannibal senses the uneasiness of Will's stance, and before he knows what's happening, the alpha has lifted him easily in his arms and placed him down on the bed. Will watches, lust and desire burn away inside him as Hannibal shucks off his jacket, waistcoat, removes his cravat and quickly takes off his boots, leaving him in just his shirt and breeches. Hannibal then covers Will with his body and resumes the kissing and stroking of Will's chest. Will's hands go to Hannibal's hair, removing the velvet ribbon holding it back and finally running his fingers through those soft strands. Will smiles at how undone Hannibal looks, long hair framing his face, he moans and leans back, his mind blissfully empty except for pleasure. Eventually, Hannibal reaches lower and begins to undo the buttons of Will's breeches revealing his undergarments, looking up at Will for approval as he undoes every lace and button. Will nods, bites his lip once more and moans. Soon Hannibal is pushing down everything, and Will is completely naked on the bed beneath the alpha. He closes his eyes as the cold air hits his body. He can feel his arousal, cock straining as slick leaks from him.

'Open your eyes, Will, please,' Hannibal says, voice soft as the alpha runs a hand down Will's side and kisses his neck once more before covering his body and looking into Will's eyes. 'Will, it's all right.'

Slowly, Will opens his eyes and sees Hannibal is smiling. His eyes are bright with desire, which makes Will flushed again. No one has ever looked at him like this before. His hands hover over Hannibal's waist. He wants to feel the alpha's body against his. Hannibal nods his encouragement, and Will begins to untuck the shirt from Hannibal's breaches. His hands are roaming underneath the cotton, finding warm skin, soft chest hair, hard muscle. The alpha removes his shirt and throws it to the ground as Will's hands scrape up and down the alpha's back. It is all so different to anything Will has experienced before. The planes of Hannibal's body are so different to his own and Molly's. The muscle is hard, unyielding, but there are some softer parts too, all of it powerful, and he can feel the strength of the alpha, how much Hannibal is holding back. It takes Will's breath away. He places a hand on the back of Hannibal's neck, hands tangled in soft long hair, he pulls the alpha down so he can kiss those soft lips once more, needing to ground himself.

They break apart for a moment, and Hannibal starts to undo his breaches, Will smiles and moves his hands to help. Soon they are both naked on the bed, and Will gasps when he feels and sees Hannibal's arousal bobbing between the alpha's legs. His body aches, his hole leaks slick, hot and wet as if begging to be filled. He has never felt like this before. With Molly, it was all soft and gentle curves. She was small for a female alpha. It had never bothered Will, but now confronted with what Hannibal has to offer, he is both terrified and utterly aroused.

Hannibal kisses the curve of his shoulder and then chastely on the lips, running a soothing hand down Will's cheek.

‘I know it’s a lot,’ the alpha says. ‘As I said, we can go slow. Let me taste you? Open you up a bit more?’

Will moans at the idea of Hannibal between his legs. Before he can even answer, his legs have seemingly fallen open. ‘Yes, yes, please,’ Will whimpers.

Hannibal smiles, and Will watches as the alpha lowers himself between Will’s legs. He closes his eyes, arches his neck and moans as Hannibal’s tongue licks a stripe from his leaking hole to his leaking, jerking cock. The alpha grips onto Will’s thighs, fingers pressing into him, pushing him apart to gain more access. Will can feel just the tip of a tongue at first, a kiss and a slight sucking, a teasing lick of his rim, and he moans again as he moves down, wanting more, but Hannibal holds him firm. The alpha wants to take his time. Will’s arms go up to the headrest of the bed, gripping onto the wood for dear life as his arousal and heat begin to take over his mind completely. He lets it happen, allows his body to take over. He has never done this before, and it feels as if he never wants this to end.

Before Will realises it, Hannibal has inserted more tongue inside his hole, licking and exploring, tasting the slick which is coming fast and heavy. The once chaste kisses are now wet, sucking and bruising on his sensitive entrance. Will can do nothing but whimper and tremble as Hannibal tortures him with his mouth. Hannibal then removes one hand from Will’s thigh and begins to insert a finger inside him as well as the tongue, pressing and exploring until it finds the sweet spot of nerves inside Will. He can feel pre-cum leaking from his cock now as if he could come untouched from this alone. Hannibal inserts two more fingers and removes his mouth just as Will whimpers in protest. His omegan cock is then completely engulfed by Hannibal’s mouth. He dares to open his eyes and witness the gloriously filthy sight between his legs of Hannibal devouring him, head bobbing, obscene sucking noises fill the room, and Will has no choice but to come loudly down Hannibal’s throat as yet more slick leaks from his hole.

Hannibal swallows every drop Will releases, greedily it seems to Will, which just makes it even hotter. He can feel his body shaking with need now as Hannibal comes up the bed once more, kissing Will so he can taste himself on the alpha’s tongue. It is deliciously filthy, and Will moans into the kiss bringing his arms back around Hannibal and finding his ass, squeezing the perfect flesh he finds there. The alpha moans now as Will squeezes and ruts up against him.

‘Hannibal, please, I need, please….’ Will whimpers. He is incoherent now with want. His whole body is burning with need, a need for Hannibal.

‘Shhh, Will, I’ve got you,’ Hannibal whispers as he kisses Will once more.

‘Alpha, please, please, oh god.’

The moment the word leaves Will’s lips, Hannibal growls. It makes Will smile as he now knows the power his begging has over the alpha. ‘Alpha, please, please, I need you,’ Will whimpers.

‘You will be the death of me, omega,’ Hannibal growls and lines up his cock to Will’s waiting and leaking hole. ‘Are you ready for me?’

‘Yes, please, I need you,’ Will whimpers.

Hannibal steadies himself with his arms on either side of Will as he lifts his ass so Hannibal can slide himself inside. The alpha, as promised, is slow, torturously slow, and Will can feel every inch as it enters him. He cries out in pain at first, but soon his body adjusts, and he feels so full it makes him almost pass out with pleasure.

‘Stay with me, Will, stay with me a little longer,’ Hannibal says, and Will manages to open his eyes. His hands are still on Hannibal’s ass, and he squeezes once more. ‘Good, I’m going to move now,’ Hannibal says, and Will nods.

The alpha slowly thrusts his hips. Will can feel every vibration through his body. He has never felt this before. No part of him is not burning up with desire for the man above him. His mind is blissfully free as his body is crashed with wave after wave of pleasure. He looks up at the alpha above him and can scarcely believe his eyes, the look of lust in his eyes makes Will tremble even more. No one has ever looked at him like that before. His heat flows through his veins now. Every part of him is burning with need. He whimpers and moans as he begins to feel himself passing out from it all. He gasps as a shape of a creature above him mists in front of his eyes, glistening black skin, white eyes and antlers growing like tree branches from its head. Instead of being scared, Will finds himself coming again, loud and wet. The power of this being above him makes him want to cling on and never let go. Just before he finally closes his eyes and succumbs to the unending orgasm, Hannibal pushes his knot inside Will, the pain brings Will back momentarily, and he can once again see the alpha above him, gloriously tanned skin and burning red eyes. He whimpers as Hannibal soothes him with a voice made of silk.

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Hannibal had managed to adjust them so they are led in a more comfortable position after Will passed out. His knot is still tightly inside Will as the omega moans and wriggles in restless sleep. Every movement, of course, sends a shockwave of pleasure through Hannibal. He isn’t sure he has anything left to give though his body desperately tries. With Will this close, his scent, his heat, is intoxicating. He isn’t sure he has ever experienced anything quite like it. The omega’s lithe but strong body in his arms, the heat and weight of him next to Hannibal, is glorious. Will’s eyes flicker open, and the omega cranes his neck, which Hannibal cannot help but kiss as a whimper leaves those pink lips.

‘Hannibal?’ Will moans.

‘Yes, my love,’ Hannibal replies, stroking a hand down Will’s sweat-drenched side.

‘It feels so… I’m so full…please don’t leave.’

‘Never my love, never, sleep now, rest, let me take care of you,’ Hannibal whispers and watches as Will once more succumbs to unconsciousness in his arms.

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By the time Will comes to, darkness has begun to fall, and Hannibal's knot has finally started to deflate, though he is still nestled comfortably inside the omega as he cradles Will in his arms.

'What time is it?' Will mumbles as his eyes flicker open, the blue a little clearer now, less heat hazed.

'Late or early, not sure,' Hannibal says and laughs.

'Have we been in bed all day?' Will says as that wonderful blush colours his cheeks once more.

'Most of it, yes, but we have not been disturbed. No one will miss us for a day or so,' Hannibal says and kisses the pale curve of Will's still warm shoulder. 'How are you feeling?'

'A little embarrassed,' Will says, not looking at Hannibal.

'My love, why?'

'I have never…lost control like that before…It was… I can't even remember most of it.'

Hannibal smiles. 'I can. It was wonderful. Please never apologise. You were glorious.'

'I can still feel my heat, it's lessened, but with you this close, it just feels like a matter of time before another wave crashes down. I've never had one like this before.'

'Will, look at me,' Hannibal says and watches as the omega reluctantly looks up. 'We have all the time in the world, it's just you and me in this room, and you may do as you like, trust me, I have enjoyed everything immensely. I am sorry I am beginning to lose my knot.'

Will blushes deep red then, and Hannibal smiles at the sight. 'This is all very strange,' Will says, looking far too coy, a complete change from the wanton creature begging for more that was beneath him just hours ago.

'It is normal and natural Will, you have nothing to be embarrassed about.'

'Is it always like this? I mean, between a male alpha and omega? I mean, I've never experienced that before, that loss of control and I feel so… so relaxed,' Will runs a hand through his still-damp curls, and Hannibal laughs.

'No, it's not. This has been more intense than I have experienced as well. I've not been with many omegas, Will. Please do not think me promiscuous, but I can tell you that the few I have encountered have been nothing like you. I wonder if we have been waiting for each other all these years.' As soon as he says it, he knows he has overstepped, and he reaches up to stroke Will's cheek. 'I do not intend to diminish what you had with Molly, Will. I just mean after everything, all these years, we have found each other. If this is all we have, then I am glad for it. I will admit to hoping for more, in your own time, of course.'

‘Do we have to talk about it now?’ Will says, and that glint in his eyes is returning.

‘No, no, we don’t.’

‘Then kiss me, please kiss me and make love to me again. That’s all I want right now.’

Hannibal cannot help but feel his stomach flip at hearing those words as he leans forward and captures those beautiful soft lips with his own.

Will’s omegan instincts have kicked in again, and the omega begins to thrust himself against Hannibal. ‘Oh, Will!’ Hannibal groans, the weight and heat of Will glorious.

Will growls with desire then which Hannibal finds goes straight to his already spent cock. Before he knows what is happening, Will has pushed him flat on his back and straddles him, hands pressed against Hannibal’s stomach. The view of Will’s hairless chest, pink, aroused nipples, pale flawless skin is so breathtakingly beautiful that Hannibal cannot help but scrape a hand down the omega’s tempting chest. Will lifts himself up and takes Hannibal inside him once more. He groans with pleasure as the omega begins to move his hips achingly slowly.

‘Will!’

Smiling now, Will continues his thrusting, taking his pleasure from Hannibal. It is glorious to see Will like this, free and taking charge. He wants to see more of this Will, this abandonment to pleasure. He clutches onto Will’s hips as the omega thrusts and moans above him, the omega’s cock bobbing and dripping onto Hannibal’s stomach.

‘Can you touch yourself, omega, come for me,’ Hannibal moans. He wants to see Will abandon himself to this, to him, to them.

Will opens his eyes and looks at Hannibal, lust-filled and heat hazed, he moans at the sight. The omega then removes one hand from Hannibal’s stomach and wraps it around his cock, continuing his thrusting now into his hand as well. Will leans back, long neck temptingly arched. He imagines biting into those pale tendons, watching that red blood drip down pale white skin. Will keeps up his thrusting, faster and harder now. Hannibal wishes this moment could last forever. He can feel his knot swelling once more. He had not thought it was possible. Will comes, clenching tightly around Hannibal’s cock, cum messily and hot leaks over his hand and drips cum onto Hannibal’s stomach. He watches in awe as Will, thrusting his hips still, licks the cum from his fingers. The sight is so wonderfully filthy Hannibal cannot help but moan and increase his grip on Will’s hips.

The omega is moaning and whimpering now, lost to his own pleasure once more.

‘Yes, omega, Will, yes, keep going, oh, yes!’ Hannibal is lost too. His body is on fire as if lightning struck and licked every inch of his skin.

Will does as asked and continues his thrusting, sweat beading on the omega’s skin now, glorious pools of it, rivulets dripping down his chest. Hannibal wants to lick every one.

‘Knot, I need, I need your knot,’ Will moans, and before Hannibal can do anything, Will has lifted himself up and then back down, taking Hannibal’s knot fully inside. The omega whimpers and then falls onto Hannibal’s chest. He wraps his arms around the damp, hot creature and cradles him as yet another orgasm wrecks Hannibal’s body.

Hannibal kisses Will’s neck and strokes the damp strands of his hair as he lets his orgasm fill Will up, and he never wants this moment to end.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! I'm exhausted!

Comments are the beads of sweat dripping down Will's chest and kudos is the moment Will undoes the ribbon from Hannibal's hair

More next week! Promise we will get back to the plot then!

A Shared Bath

Chapter Summary

Will had still not had a chance to speak to Walt. He had wanted to before the ball tonight, but time had gotten away from him. He had slept for three hours straight before being woken by Winston and begun getting ready for this evening. Finding Walt at the ball to speak to him might be a little tricky. He had wanted to do it somewhere private. Perhaps it could wait another day. Of course, the other issue was how he and Hannibal would be together in public now. He didn't want everyone knowing, especially before Walt and Abigail, so he had asked Hannibal to act as if they were just friends. The alpha had grinned and asked if that meant they were more than just friends, which had made Will blush again. How could they not be, after spending the last two days in bed together?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next time they wake, the sun is beginning to stream in through the curtains. Will smiles as he looks over at the sleeping alpha beside him. He should be embarrassed at his behaviour last night, but his current deep satisfaction and relaxation outweigh it completely. He stretches out his naked body and doesn't feel any pain or stiffness for the first time in years, not even in his leg. He cannot move from Hannibal's embrace. He is being held tightly, the alpha's knot has deflated again, so at least he can wriggle free a bit. As soon as he does, Hannibal wakes and pulls him closer.

'Where are you going?' Hannibal mumbles and kisses Will's shoulder.

Will laughs. 'I was going to use the privy, but I appear to be stuck.'

'Well, I am not sure I am ready to let you go,' Hannibal chuckles and kisses Will softly on the lips.

'Would you rather I wet the bed?' Will laughs. 'It's already pretty ruined!'

Hannibal smiles. 'Yes, I suppose you are right but hurry back.'

The alpha lets Will go, and he gets out of the bed and stretches properly. Usually, he would feel self-conscious about his nudity, but the way Hannibal looks him up and down negates any feelings of worry. Will goes to use the privy, there is dried slick all down his thighs, and he sighs. He needs to have a bath.

He returns to the bedroom and goes to say something but is stopped by the knock at the door. 'Sir?' The voice that is clearly Winston says. 'May I come in?'

He looks at Hannibal, stretched out like a cat with a grin on his face a mile wide.

'Um, just a moment Winston,' Will says and grabs his dressing-gown, which he hastily puts on.

'How are you feeling? Would you like some breakfast?' Winston asks.

Hannibal nods, 'yes, Will, get us some food.'

Will looks at him with his best death stare.' Shhh, he can't know you are in here!'

'Sir? Is everything alright? I thought I heard something?'

'Yes, yes fine,' Will says and looks back at Hannibal. 'Shh! While I get rid of him!'

Hannibal laughs and stretches out more. 'This is my house, Will. I can be in any room I like, or bed for that matter.'

'Just shhh!' Will says and opens the door a crack to see Winston stood looking concerned.

'Are you quite alright, Sir?'

'Yes, everything is fine. I just had a fever,' Will says.

'I would say I could call for the Count, but no one seems to know where he is. I was hoping perhaps you might know?' Winston says and raises an eyebrow. Will realises at that moment that Winston can see the pile of clothes on the floor that definitely doesn't belong to Will.

'I am sure he is fine,' Will says as Hannibal laughs, causing Winston to raise both eyebrows.

'Oh Will, stop being ridiculous and let the man in,' Hannibal says, and Will wants to die of embarrassment. 'I am sure he has witnessed you in worse states!'

'Indeed,' Winston says. The butler appears to be smiling, amused at the situation, which just makes it worse.

Will gives in and allows Winston inside. 'Good morning, ma'Lord,' Winston says to Hannibal, who nods.

'I believe we require some breakfast, a bath and a change of sheets,' Hannibal says, and Will covers his face as he thinks of how stained and sodden those sheets are.

'Right away, my Lord. I shall get the servants to draw a bath in your rooms, my Lord, and then we can change the sheets here. Perhaps your own room might offer a little more privacy?'

'Wonderful idea, Winston. I assume Abigail is still out?'

'Yes, she stayed at Lady DuMaurier's,' Winston replies.

'Perfect then Will's modesty can remain intact as we change rooms,'

'I shall get started on the bath. I'll get the servants to leave the tray outside once it's done.'

'As always, Winston, you are the measure of discretion,' Hannibal says.

Winston nods and leaves, giving Will a wry smile before exiting.

'How humiliating!'

Hannibal laughs. 'He doesn't mind, and my servants know to be discreet. Come back here and let me kiss you before we have to leave this bed.'

'How can you be so relaxed about this?' Will says as the previous feeling of relaxation is beginning to leave him.

'Come here,' Hannibal says, and Will reluctantly walks to the bed and lies next to Hannibal, who turns to him. 'There is nothing to worry about. You are tense again. What I can do about that?'

Will blushes as he thinks of all the things they have done. 'We don't have time, and I need a bath. I am a mess.'

'Hmm,' Hannibal says as those lithe hands begin to undo the belt of his robe. 'Never a mess to me. What would you like? What would make you feel good again?'

Will blushes as he does know what he wants, but to say it would be just too far. 'For you to… kiss me… where you kissed me before….'

Hannibal smiles and moves so he is covering Will's body with his own. 'You liked that, my mouth… my tongue….'

'Oh god, yes!' Will moans and leans back as Hannibal parts the robe from him and begins to kiss down his chest, sucking a nipple as he goes. Before Will can even think Hannibal is once more between his legs sucking and kissing him, his cock is flinching awake again, and fresh slick leaks from his hole.

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They had eventually made it to Hannibal's room, where there was a bath waiting for them as well as a tray of tea and breakfast. In the end, they had eaten quickly before both ending up in the bath together. Will was resting against Hannibal's back as the alpha dozed in the comforting water. Will looked at his body in the water, something he always did when he bathed. Usually, his skin was sallow pale, his legs thin and bones sharp. His body would ache and be soothed momentarily by the hot water before creaking once more as he left the water. Now, as he moved his legs and looked down at his skin, he could see and feel that things had changed.

He no longer aches for one thing, able just to enjoy the water's heat, his skin too, while pale was not sallow, it was luminous, especially next to Hannibal's tanned muscular legs. He is

fascinated with how different their legs are but also how well they seem to fit together. His cock, too, looks larger, more swollen, probably just from his heat, but it is strange to see it there. He stretches out his legs once more, and Hannibal laughs.

'You keep fidgeting. What is so fascinating?' Hannibal says.

'Sorry, I just, I look so different,' Will admits.

'As I told you, the omega was always there. You just needed someone to bring it out; I am honoured it was me.'

Will cranes his neck to look up Hannibal, who meets his eyes. 'This is all so unexpected.'

'I know,' Hannibal says and strokes a gently hand down Will's arm. 'It was for me too. I never expected to meet anyone at this late stage in my life. You are not the only one who feels changed; I feel younger than I have in years.'

'You do?'

'Yes, most assuredly. All the other complications we may face, well we will see them through together.'

Will frowns and looks back at his feet. 'I will have to speak to Walt, as soon as this heat passes.'

'I too shall speak to Abigail. I am sure we can work this all out. You deserve to be happy, Will, don't forget that.'

Will is quiet for a moment as he remembers the promise he made to Molly as she died in his arms. 'I promised her, before she died, that I would always look after him.'

Hannibal holds him tighter. 'You have, Will, you have. You have fulfilled your promise and more. Walt is going to be fine. You are allowed a future Will; she would have wanted that for you.'

Will thinks about it. Molly was always pragmatic, and she had perhaps never envisioned Will being able to move on from her. They had never discussed what he might do if he managed to survive her passing for longer than Walt's childhood. He had always thought he would probably fade away within five years or less as most omega's do after an alpha's death. His longevity has been unexpected. He wonders what she would think to see him led in this bath with a male alpha. He laughs when he imagines her smile.

'I think she would be very surprised,' Will admits. 'But, yes, I think perhaps, happy for me.'

'You will feel better once you and Walt have spoken,' Hannibal says.

'How much longer of this heat do you think I have?' Will asks, hoping and also not hoping it will be over soon.

Hannibal scents him, running his nose along his shoulder and into the curve of his neck. 'I would say at least today, one more night. In the morning, it should start to wane.'

Will leans back into Hannibal and sighs. 'What will you tell Abigail?'

'I will tell her I am taking care of you and that she should stay at Bedelia's. You need peace and quiet.'

'Lie, then,' Will says, unsure how he feels about that.

'Not lie, I am taking care of you, and you do need rest and quiet, well not quiet, you are actually rather loud,' Hannibal says and laughs.

'You are not that quiet either!' Will retorts.

'I shall have a message sent to her and Walt informing them we shall be indisposed for a day or so. We shall see them at the ball on Saturday.'

Will had forgotten completely about the ball. Walt and Abigail's first event of the season. 'Oh, yes, of course.'

'I will be there with you. It might be fun,' Hannibal says and kisses the curve of Will's shoulder again.

'You and I have very different ideas of fun,' Will says and closes his eyes.

'Not that different,' Hannibal says as his hand begins to navigate lower, and Will moans at the thought of where it is going.

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Another day and night had indeed passed before Will began to feel like his old self. He had stayed in Hannibal's room throughout this time. It had been a blur of wonderful pleasure but also some laughter too. He was becoming so comfortable in Hannibal's presence that he cannot imagine his life without the alpha. A thought both terrifying and exciting. A feeling he is fast becoming to associate as normal with Hannibal. They had finally parted as Hannibal had some arrangements to make regarding the ball, and Will, if he was honest, had needed some uninterrupted sleep before the ball. So with reluctance, they had left the confines of Hannibal's room, Will had gone to his own, and Hannibal had left to return in a few hours.

Will had still not had a chance to speak to Walt. He had wanted to before the ball tonight, but time had gotten away from him. He had slept for three hours straight before being woken by Winston and begun getting ready for this evening. Finding Walt at the ball to speak to him might be a little tricky. He had wanted to do it somewhere private. Perhaps it could wait another day. Of course, the other issue was how he and Hannibal would be together in public now. He didn't want everyone knowing, especially before Walt and Abigail, so he had asked Hannibal to act as if they were just friends. The alpha had grinned and asked if that meant they were more than just friends, which had made Will blush again. How could they not be, after spending the last two days in bed together?

He is trying to find something to wear while all those thoughts are swirling around his mind. He has sent Winston to press one of his old shirts under protest, the butler believes it to not be up to scratch in comparison to his new wardrobe, but Will wanted the option of something familiar. He hears the door creak open and a voice he would recognise anywhere say his name.

'Will? Are you decent?' Margot says, peering through the door.

'Yes, dear Margot, come on in,' he says and turns to see Margot dressed in emerald green, looking every inch the beautiful omega woman she is. She makes it all look so effortless he envies that.

'I am glad I caught you,' she says as she gently closes the door behind her. 'I wanted to speak before the ball. Are you feeling better?'

Will hopes he is not blushing. 'Yes, much, why are you here? I thought we were meeting there?'

'Well, I was at the police station again, had to sign some papers, and I wanted to come by here and speak to you before I went home,' Margot says, her voice a whisper.

'Sit down,' Will says and ushers her to a chair by the window. 'Can I get you anything?'

'No, no, I'm fine, thank you,' she says, waving him away as he takes a seat on the edge of his bed. 'You look very fine in that pale blue, by the way. Was that Hannibal's offering?'

Will looks down at himself and frowns. 'Yes, I am afraid I am not sure it works. You should have asked me to come with you to the police, Margot.'

'I know you weren't well, and it was just some papers, it's fine. I wanted to check in with you, make sure you were alright? I know it's been such a trying time, and I also wanted to thank you and Hannibal for everything you did.'

Hearing her refer to Hannibal and him together is threatening to make Will blush again. 'Hannibal was happy to help, and I know I shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but I, as you must be, is relieved that this whole Mason ordeal is over.'

She nods carefully. 'Yes, I am relieved in some ways. I do wonder how it happened, but I suppose we will never know. Detective Crawford is not convinced we will ever know what happened with Mason or those other disappearances. Unless it was a bear….'

Will knows it wasn't. He also knows that Margot knows it wasn't. They look at each other for a moment, and Will moves to sit next to her. He takes her hand in his. 'Does it matter? In the end?'

Margot squeezes his hand and smiles. 'I suppose not. I am glad of it this ball this evening to take my mind off everything.'

Will wishes he could say the same, he is nervous, and if he is honest, he misses Hannibal, and it's only been a few hours. Just as he has the thought, there is a knock at his door.

'My love?' A voice that is clearly Hannibal's says. 'May I come in?'

Margot looks at Will, eyebrows raised. She mouths *my love* at Will as his checks catch on fire with yet another blush.

'Yes, Hannibal,' he says. 'Come and join us.'

Margot is smiling now and trying not to laugh.

'Us?' Hannibal says and flings the door open, in what Will could believe is some kind of jealous worry. The look on the alpha's face goes from vexed to relaxed to embarrassed in a few seconds, confirming Will's theory. He also tries not to think about how attractive he finds that reaction in Hannibal. Just like the begging in bed, it seems as if Hannibal is very responsive to anything Will says. That blush gets even hotter.

'Margot!' Hannibal says and closes the door behind him. 'I had no idea you were here. How are you?'

Margot laughs and stands up, taking Hannibal's hand, 'not as well as the pair of you, apparently.'

Will groans. 'Oh Margot, please don't say anything yet. We haven't had a chance to talk to Walt or Abigail.'

Margot turns to Will and smiles. 'Your secret is safe with me. Just for the record, I think it's wonderful. Molly would want you to be happy, Will. You haven't looked better in years.'

'That's what I have been trying to tell him,' Hannibal adds softly.

'Well, I am glad to help. I had better go. I'll leave you two alone. Will, don't worry, I won't say a thing,' Margot says and then turns to Hannibal. 'Take care of him, Hannibal.'

'I can promise that with all my heart,' Hannibal says, and with that, Margot leaves.

'I cannot believe we have already outed ourselves,' Will says as he looks up at Hannibal. He is so relieved to see the alpha, though, that the worry does not quite take hold.

Hannibal sits down next to Will and takes his hand. 'Margot can keep a secret. After tonight we can speak to the children, and all will be well.' Will nods and allows himself to be comforted. 'Now, stand up, let me get a look at you in this outfit.'

Will laughs and stands up. 'Shall I twirl for you?'

Hannibal smiles. 'Well, as you offered.'

Will twirls around, and Hannibal grabs him pulling him down onto this lap. 'You look lovely,' Hannibal says.

'I don't think anyone has ever used that word to describe to me,' Will says as Hannibal runs a hand through Will's hair.

'Well, they should,' Hannibal says and kisses Will softly.

'I missed you,' Will says once they have parted. 'I missed you more than I thought I should. It has only been a few hours.'

'I felt it too. I missed you. I rushed back. Sorry about Margot, I was just so keen to see you that I didn't think to check with Winston.'

'Actually, he'll be back in a minute,' Will remembers.

Hannibal frowns. 'That is a shame. I was hoping we could have a few moments alone, especially now I have seen you in this.'

'Hannibal! We have to be there in a few hours, and you aren't even dressed,' Will protests, but it's soon pointless as Hannibal's hands begin wandering up Will's back.

'I have to get changed anyway, so you may as well help me,' Hannibal says, kissing Will's neck.

'You are incorrigible,' Will says, arching his neck so Hannibal can have more access.

'Am I? Shall I stop?'

'No, absolutely not,' Will says and laughs.

Chapter End Notes

comments are Will's legs and kudos are Hannibal's ever-wandering hands...

The Ball

Chapter Summary

> Bedelia is clearly taken aback. 'I would disagree. Hannibal is very much my business. In fact, within society, he is everyone's business. This is something you fail to grasp. As much as Hannibal is a free spirit, he also has responsibilities that extend to Abigail. Her reputation must be beyond reproach, and so, therefore, must Hannibal's. If either he or Abigail were to be associated with the wrong type of person, well, I would not like to see them…outcast. There has been talk, Mr Graham, talk I do not, for one, approve of.'
>
> 'Talk? What talk?'
>
> 'I do not like to repeat gossip,' Bedelia says.
>
> 'But clearly, you listen to it.'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a very short carriage ride, too short for Will's liking, as his favourite thing is being pressed against Hannibal in such a small space, they arrive at the ball. It is taking place in the large museum in the city, the building's columns tower above a wide stone staircase.

'There are a lot of people here, Hannibal,' Will says, looking out at the crowds from the inside of the carriage.

Hannibal takes his hand and squeezes it. 'You'll be fine, you look wonderful, and I'm right here with you.'

Will takes a deep breath. His outfit is pale blue, a colour he has never worn, it's also much tighter than anything he's used to, and he feels more than a bit self-conscious in it. 'Perhaps a quick kiss before we get out, just to calm me,' Will teases, and Hannibal smiles before grasping Will's face with both hands and kissing him with abandon.

'Better?' Hannibal asks, and Will smiles then nods. 'Are you ready?'

'Yes, I think so, as I'll ever be,' Will says.

They make their way outside, up the stone stairs and into the open hall. A sweeping staircase leads down to the main ballroom. The top of the steps is where they announce guests as they arrive. Two men dressed in bright red coats with gleaming gold buttons seem to know who everyone is without being prompted.

A queue of extravagantly dressed people all wait excitedly talking as the music wafts in from the ballroom, interrupted by the steady stream of names being shouted over the din. Will looks around and is unsure he's ever been in a room with so many people before, especially not people staring at him because of who he is with. Molly was well-liked and respected, but she was not a Countess. Hannibal is very well known and prominent in society. Will's cheeks burn as he realises most people are talking about him. He looks around for Walt, or Margot and Alana but can't see them. Hannibal's name, followed by his, are announced as they enter the main ballroom, and everyone looks at them. Will wants the ground to open up and swallow him, feeling ridiculous in this get-up. Hannibal takes his hand, and the connection makes him feel calmer.

They're soon spotted by Abigail, Lady DuMaurier, Margot and Alana, who all make a beeline to them. Abigail runs over to Will, taking his hand. She rushedly asks, 'how are you feeling, Will? We've all been so dreadfully worried.'

'I tried to tell her you were in capable hands,' Margot says, and Will blushes again.

'I'm fine, Abigail, much better, no need to worry,' Will responds.

'You look wonderful. It's so nice to see you in some colour. Did papa pick that out?'

'I did indeed,' Hannibal says and kisses Abigail on the cheek. 'You also look lovely, my dear.'

'Thank you, papa! Do you like it? Really? I was worried it was a bit too much, but the lace is just so beautiful!'

'It looks wonderful on you, dear, as I'm sure Bedelia has told you,' Hannibal says, smiling at his ward.

'I have,' Bedelia says. 'I am glad to see you both and Will looking so dashing! I am starting to understand the fuss Hannibal has been making.'

Will's cheeks prickle as Hannibal stands a little closer to him. He breathes in the alpha's scent, soothing his nerves.

'You do look lovely,' Alana says, looking him up and down. 'I have to say. Why didn't you listen to us when we tried to get you to dress more adventurously?!'

'I never had occasion, until now,' Will admits. 'Where is Walt?'

'Uh! Late, as always!' Abigail moans. 'Why are you two so late?'

'We are fashionably late. I wanted Will to make an entrance,' Hannibal says, and Will looks at him with daggers.

'We just got held up, that's all,' Will says, and Margot is knowingly smiling at him as if she hadn't left the room earlier but instead witnessed the many acts that happened so that Will had to get dressed again.

'I am sure,' Margot says.

'Here he is now, Abigail,' Alana says, and they all look as Walt is announced and enters the room.

Abigail waves at him, and Bedelia rolls her eyes. 'Have some decorum, young lady!'

Walt soon appears and embraces Abigail in a chaste hug. 'I am sorry I'm late, work ran rather long, and I had to change.'

'You look very handsome,' Abigail says. 'Do you like my dress?'

'Oh yes, very much, it's beautiful,' Walt says, and Abigail beams.

'I am so glad you think so. I think we look quite the pair, don't you, Bedelia?' Abigail says.

Bedelia makes a show of looking them up and down. 'Yes, I will admit you both look very dashing,' she says, and Abigail smiles.

'Dance with me?' she says to Walt.

'If that's alright, Count?' Walt asks Hannibal. 'Oh Will! I didn't recognise you!' Walt says and embraces Will. 'You look so different!'

'I wish everyone would stop saying that. It's the same old me, just in nicer clothes!' Will protests. He didn't think his old wardrobe was that bad.

'He looks so handsome, doesn't he, Walt? I think Hannibal has been good for him! We all have!' Abigail coos.

'Yes, yes, I suppose that must be it,' Walt says, but his eyes look at Will and seem to be filled with questions. Will feels bad, he wishes he could speak to Walt, but this is not the right time.

'Please, you and Abigail go and dance,' Hannibal says and takes Walt's hand. 'I give my approval willingly, Walt. You must know that. Make her happy. We shall speak in the next few days.'

Walt looks shocked, and his eyes dart towards Will. 'You two are not as discreet as you think,' Will says.

'But papa, you approve?' Abigail says.

'Of course, my darling girl, all I want is your happiness, and if this young man makes you happy, how can I refuse?'

'Thank you, papa,' she says and embraces Hannibal in a big hug before doing the same to Will.

'Now, go dance,' Hannibal says, and Abigail whisks Walt off to the dance floor under the watchful eyes of the rest of society.

'This should cause a stir, Hannibal,' Bedelia remarks.

'I was never one for the conventional, Bedelia. You must know that,' Hannibal responds.

'I think it's wonderful!' Alana says. 'Come on, Margot, let's watch them!'

Margot and Alana follow Walt and Abigail to the dance floor, leaving Hannibal and Will alone. Will is relieved and takes Hannibal's hand and squeezes it. 'That was nice of you,' he says. 'To say that to Abigail and Walt.'

'It's just how I feel. I will speak to her tomorrow, of course, after you and Walt have spoken. I believe it best for you to approach Walt first.'

'Yes, yes, you are right,' Will says and is once more thankful for how Hannibal always seems to know what he's thinking.

'For now, would you like a drink?' Hannibal asks, and Will smiles.

'Yes, I think that might be a good idea,' Will says.

'I shall take care of him in your absence,' Bedelia says. Will had quite forgotten she was standing there, and he quickly removes his hand from Hannibal's.

Hannibal leans forward to Bedelia, and Will hears him say, 'be nice.' Before leaving to get them drinks.

'Well, Will,' Bedelia says with emphasis on his name, her disapproval clear with every syllable. 'You look rather dashing this evening.'

Will looks down and feels like a fool once more. 'I am starting to feel like mutton dressed as lamb.'

'Nonsense,' Bedelia says. 'You look every bit the part.'

'The part?'

'Well, if you are going to be married to a Count, one must look the part even if they don't act it.'

'Married?' Will says.

'I assume that is what you want from Hannibal.'

'I…Lady DuMaurier, I am not sure what you mean,' Will says, wishing Hannibal would return.

'You and he have become close. He is very fond of you, that is clear. How is the leg? You don't need the stick anymore, I see?'

'It's much better, thank you,' Will says, unsure what exactly it is Bedelia is implying. 'Hannibal has been very kind to me, and to Walt, I am very grateful for that.'

'I am sure you are,' Bedelia says.

Will is irritated now. 'Hannibal has given his approval to Walt, approval that Walt has earned.'

'Yes, apparently.'

'I don't want to be rude, Lady DuMaurier, but are you implying something?'

Bedelia smiles, but it does not reach her eyes. 'I think we understand each other, Mr Graham, I care for Hannibal a great deal, and Abigail, if any harm were to come to either of them, I would be most… upset.'

'Why or how do you think I, or Walt, would harm them. It is clear to anyone who has eyes that Walt cares deeply for Abigail, and as for Hannibal and I, well that is, quite frankly, none of your business.'

Bedelia is clearly taken aback. 'I would disagree. Hannibal is very much my business. In fact, within society, he is everyone's business. This is something you fail to grasp. As much as Hannibal is a free spirit, he also has responsibilities that extend to Abigail. Her reputation must be beyond reproach, and so, therefore, must Hannibal's. If either he or Abigail were to be associated with the wrong type of person, well, I would not like to see them…outcast. There has been talk, Mr Graham, talk I do not, for one, approve of.'

'Talk? What talk?'

'I do not like to repeat gossip,' Bedelia says.

'But clearly, you listen to it.'

'I cannot help what has been told to me. I am glad you are better after your… fever.'

'Lady DuMaurier, if you have an issue with me, please just tell me.'

'Well, if we are being so forward, I worry as to what your intentions are.'

'My intentions.'

'Yes, it is well known that Trap Estate is not in the most secure of positions until Walt marries, and when that happens, I imagine your prospects become uncertain. I would imagine someone in your position would be on the look out for someone who could secure their future.'

'You think I am after Hannibal for his money,' Will says.

'Well, I wasn't going to be quite so vulgar about it, but yes. I think we all know what omegas can do. I mean, we all know what a sudden fever in one can mean…as we are being vulgar.'

'You think I… I lured Hannibal in with a heat!'

Bedelia looks shocked. 'Mr Graham, I would never be so… well. Let's just say you used your omegan wiles to enchant Hannibal. He has never been this… smitten… with anyone before. In fact, I never thought him capable.'

'I am not sure what to say,' Will says, as fury bubbles up inside him. 'Whatever you may think of omegas, Lady DuMaurier, I can assure that they cannot control their… wiles.. as you put it. I have not lured Hannibal with anything. We are friends, and that is all. Excuse me.'

Will leaves before he says another word. Making his way out of the ballroom, he finds a small room off the main entranceway where he can catch his breath for a moment. He closes the door and walks to the tall windows. Looking over at the busy street, he sighs. He knew the moment they left their bubble things would get complicated. He just hoped to be spared it for one more day. People will think he is with Hannibal for his money and that he has tricked the Count into a relationship. Why else would Hannibal be with a used up, old Omega? He looks at his reflection in the windowpane and signs again. He may look brighter than he has in years, but he is still old. He still has lines around his eyes, grey in his hair. He is not a young, pretty omega that should be on a Count's arm, and he was a fool to think this could ever work.

What about Abigail and Walt? How can he have been so selfish? They are just starting out in life. Their happiness is more important than his own. He made a promise to Molly on her death bed, and as much as she would want him to be happy, it would be not at the expense of her son. People may take a while to get used to Walt and Abigail as a couple, but anyone can see they are in love, but to ask those same society snobs to accept him and Hannibal would just be one step too far.

'Will.' A voice from behind him says. He closes his eyes and does not turn around. Hannibal appears behind him. 'I got caught up talking with that insufferable Franklyn again. You have my apologies. I promised not to leave you alone, and I fed you to the wolves or wolf, I should say. What did she say?'

'Nothing that everyone here isn't thinking,' Will says and opens his eyes to see Hannibal's reflection behind his. 'She burst the bubble, but if it wasn't her, it would have been someone else.'

'What does it matter?'

Will sighs again. 'I wish I could be a carefree as you. It does matter, and you know it does, deep down. You wouldn't want anything to tarnish Abigail's reputation.'

'What do you and I have to do with that?'

'Hannibal, you know very well that everyone will think Walt and I are after your money. I have seduced you with my omegan wiles, as Bedelia put it, and that I have forced Walt on Abigail all in a bid to secure my future.'

'I know that is not the case, and Abigail knows it too. What else matters?'

'Everything, you must see that?'

'All I see is the man I love. My daughter with the man she loves. That is all I care about.'

'It's not that simple, Hannibal. I keep trying to explain to you.'

'I keep telling you it is. Bedelia is full of nonsense, and you know that.'

'It's not just that. I want Walt to be happy, I want him to have the best start he can have, I don't want anything I do to get in the way of that.'

'You will feel better when you talk with him tomorrow. You will sit with him and talk all of this out, and then we, together, will get through whatever challenges are to come. I am not going anywhere, Will Graham. You are not alone anymore.' Hannibal takes his hand and turns him around, so they are facing each other. Just the sight and feel of the alpha calm Will, that mixture of excitement and terror claims to overwhelm him once more. 'I love you, Will Graham. I love everything about you. Your strength, your love for Walt, your worry for everyone else, your kindness, your beauty inside and out. I just wish you could see you as I do.'

'I do too!' Will admits. The person Hannibal thinks he is so much greater than the reality. 'There are things you don't know about me, Hannibal. Things which might change your mind.'

Hannibal reaches up and runs a hand through Will's hair. 'There is nothing I could learn about you that would change how I feel.'

'I beg to differ.'

'Tell me then, tell me anything, and I promise I will stay.'

'How can you make that promise?'

'Because I love you.'

'What if I told you something unforgivable?'

'I do not believe that to be possible. I know more about you than perhaps you realise.'

'What do you mean?'

'Molly's first husband.'

'What…?' Will is shocked. Just how much does Hannibal know?

'It did not take too much digging to realise. After I met you and saw the strength and fierce loyalty you display, I knew that there was more to his death. You don't have to tell me, not now, not even if that's what you wish. If you did do anything, I understand why you did it. I would have done the same to protect those I love. I have done the same to protect those I love.'

'What do you mean? You've done the same?'

'You and I protect the ones we love. It is what made you survive losing an alpha, that fierce need to protect. It is one of the things I love the most about you. As for having done the same, there are things you also do not know about me. Things that might shock you.'

'I can't believe you knew…'. Will is dumbstruck. How can Hannibal suspect him of this and still want to be with him? What has he done to deserve such kindness? Will knows there is more to Hannibal. He has sensed it from the moment they met, a darkness that doesn't scare him so much as pulls him in. He remembers the flash of the antlered figure during his heat and shivers with anticipation.

'It doesn't matter. None of it does,' Hannibal says, his voice soft in the moonlight. 'You and I, we are the same, don't you see? We would do anything to protect the ones we love. Walt has that too; it's one of the reasons I am so happy he and Abigail are together. I know he would protect her with his life. I would protect you with my life, know that Will.'

Will feels that from Hannibal, that fierce need to protect. 'I don't know what to say,' Will wants to tell Hannibal everything. There is trust there, he can feel it, but he is also scared. To admit something like that, even if Hannibal has an idea, to hear it from Will's lips might change the alpha's feelings, and he cannot risk that, not now. He also owes it to Walt and Molly to keep that secret. He must get a hold of himself.

'You don't have to say anything. You can trust me, Will, know that if nothing else,' Hannibal says, and Will wants to believe him, he wants to believe him more than anything in the world. 'Just kiss me, kiss me, and everything will be all right.'

'We can't, not here. We are supposed to be just friends, remember?' Will says, looking around the empty, dark room.

Hannibal laughs and cups Will's cheek with a warm hand. 'Allow me one kiss so I can get through the rest of the evening without. Then, please, come to my bed, spend the night with me.'

'Hannibal! I no longer have the excuse of my heat, not that that was much of an excuse!' Will can feel the blush he knows Hannibal loves creeping over his face.

'There is no one here, but you and I. Kiss me, please,' Hannibal says, and Will bites his bottom lip. Knowing it's a foregone conclusion, he leans forward and allows the alpha to capture his mouth in a wonderfully soft kiss. When they part, Will feels a breeze on his back but looks at the door, which is still closed.

'What is it?'

'I thought,' Will says and shakes his head. 'Nothing, we should get back before we are missed.'

Hannibal smiles and offers his hand to Will, who gladly takes it.

Chapter End Notes

comments are Hannibal's arms as the embrace Will, kudos is the snark exchanged between Will and Bedelia...

Thank you all for reading. Prepare yourself for drama next week!

The Fallout

Chapter Summary

> ‘What could Walt want at this hour?’ Will says hurriedly, getting out of bed. He hadn’t seen much of Walt at the ball. Walt had been off dancing with Abigail. Will had left them to it. He and Hannibal had left early as Will was finding all those people a little much.
>
> ‘Do you want me to come with you?’ Hannibal asks, sitting up.
>
> ‘No, no, I’ll go,’ Will says, worry pulling at him. Walt wouldn’t come by like this unless it were important. The boy had not asked to see Hannibal as well, just him. It would look a little suspicious if they both came down together, after all. Perhaps, this could be the chance Will needs to talk to Walt about everything. ‘I don’t know what’s wrong, and this could be a chance for him and I to speak.’
>
> ‘Yes, that’s true. Well, just send Winston up if you need me.’
>
> Will has hastily pulled on the clothes Winston left for him, and he goes over to Hannibal, giving him a quick kiss before departing the room.

Chapter Notes

> We have some angst in this chapter, a little bit of homophobia and omegaphobia. It's all a bit fraught! So make sure you have a strong cup of tea or coffee or vodka...whatever your poison. xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A knock at the door disturbs their slumber, and Will wakes, groggy and a little sore. He hopes whoever it is will not knock again. They do, and this time Hannibal wakes and groans.

‘Who is it?’ the alpha says, his tone annoyed.

‘I am sorry, my Lord, but I was hoping Sir Graham was with you. He is not in his chambers,’ Winston says, and Will groans this time.

‘Yes, Winston, come in. It better be important!’ Hannibal says, and Will hits his arm gently.

‘Don’t be rude,’ Will says. ‘Come in, Winston, what’s the problem?’

Winston enters, keeping his eyes downcast. ‘So sorry to disturb you, Lord, but young Master Walt is downstairs and very keen to see you.’

Will wakes up then. Why does Walt want to see him? Why so early? It can’t be that late. The sun is barely shining through the gap in the curtains. ‘I will be down shortly,’ Will says.

‘I took the liberty of grabbing some clothes for you,’ Winston says and places them on the chair.

‘Thank you,’ Will says, and Winston leaves.

‘What could Walt want at this hour?’ Will says hurriedly, getting out of bed. He hadn’t seen much of Walt at the ball. Walt had been off dancing with Abigail. Will had left them to it. He and Hannibal had left early as Will was finding all those people a little much.

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‘Yes, that’s true. Well, just send Winston up if you need me.’

Will has hastily pulled on the clothes Winston left for him, and he goes over to Hannibal, giving him a quick kiss before departing the room.

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The light is dim as Will enters the drawing where Walt is waiting for him by the window. He had checked the clock in the hall as he came down the stairs. It was just after seven.

‘Walt, is everything alright?’ Will says, making his way over to the boy.

‘Will, you look as if you were sleeping,’ Walt says. ‘You always used to rise so early.’

‘It was a late end to the evening last night, as you know,’ Will says, confused by Walt’s tone. ‘What has happened? You look concerned.’

‘Were you with Hannibal, just now?’ Walt says.

‘What do you mean?’ Will looks at Walt. The boys face pale and serious. Will’s can feel a hot flush over his face. Does Walt know? How had he let this happen?! How did he find out?

‘Were you in his chambers?’ Walt says, his voice colder than Will has ever heard it. ‘I heard Winston knock on your door and then move down the hall.’

‘What are you getting at, Walt?’ Will says, trying to remain calm.

‘I saw you two, at the ball, last night, together. You snuck off, much like you wanted Abigail and I to stop doing.’

‘Walt, what do you mean you saw us?’

‘In the room next to the ballroom, I followed you. I was worried it was all a bit much for you. I should have known not to worry.’

‘Oh,’ Will says and realises he had felt the door open, and it was Walt who had witnessed him and Hannibal.

‘Walt, I am sorry you found out that way. I was going to speak to you today.’

‘So you are… with him?’

‘It’s complicated, Walt.’

‘Has he asked you to marry him at least? I assume this illness you had these past few days was….well…a….’

‘A heat, yes, Walt it was,’ Will finishes for him. The look on Walt’s face is not that different from Bedelia’s disgust. Will is shocked he never thought Walt cared much about biology. It’s not as if the boy didn’t know Will was an omega.

‘You spent it with him?!’ Walt says, and Will just gently nods. ‘I thought you didn’t… that you couldn’t…. Not since Mother.’

‘As I said, it’s complicated. I never expected to have another heat,’ Will says, and Walt grimaces at the word. ‘Walt, it’s not something I can control.’

‘It’s just so… you are old and you…. With a man!’

Will is shocked now. He never thought Walt would care about that. He knew that the boy would be upset at the idea of him being with anyone else, but what would it matter of their gender? ‘Walt, I know you are upset and surprised, but there is no need to be like this. You’ve known I was an omega all your life. My biology is not something that should shock you. As for being with Hannibal, well, that was a surprise. That he is a male alpha was not something I expected to be drawn to. You should know better than anyone you cannot help who you are attracted to. And, to answer your question, he did ask me to marry him, yes.’

‘When?’

Will sighs, ‘before my heat if you are implying something.’

‘I just don’t understand… you approve of Abigail and I, he does too. Why would you do this?’

‘As I said, Walt, it was not planned,’ Will says, taking a step towards Walt, who takes one back and starts to pace around the room.

‘You said you were just friends,’ Walt says, and Will can hear the crack in the boy’s voice, the upset, hurt and anger. ‘That you would always love my mother.’

Will can feel that cavern of grief and guilt open up inside him. He should have spoken to Walt before he spent his heat with Hannibal, but everything happened so fast. He takes a deep breath, trying to find the words he needs to calm Walt down. ‘I do love her, and when I said that nothing had happened between Hannibal and I, that was true. My heat changed things. I never wanted to hurt you. As for Abigail and you, nothing has changed. We both still approve, of course. Hannibal was going to speak to Abigail today as well. We were not going to hide this from you. I would never do that.’

Walt stops his pacing and turns to face Will. His face is ashen, and it makes Will break. ‘But you would, you have.’

‘Walt, please just allow me to explain,’

‘I don’t want to hear any more about it,’ Walt says and turns away. ‘I can’t even look at you right now.’

‘Walt, there is no need to be this upset, please, just let me explain.’

Walt turns then and looks at him with a steeled eyed gaze. ‘Do you even still have it?’

‘Have what?’

‘The picture of Mother, the one you said you always carried with you, where is it now?’

He pats his pocket and realises it’s not there. It is still in the drawer he’d put it in before his heat. ‘It’s upstairs. I was getting dressed in a hurry. I have not forgotten her.’

‘But you have, and you have forgotten yourself and me. You have been selfish. I will never forgive this, Will, never.’ Walt turns and walks towards the door.

‘Walt, wait…’ Will begs. Walt pauses for a moment, his hand hovering over the doorknob before opening the door and leaving.

Will wants to go after him, but he knows it would be pointless. The boy is too upset. He stares at the door before finding his way to the couch and sitting down. He cannot believe he got this so wrong. He should never have listened to Hannibal.

Winston appears, opening the door a crack. ‘My Lord,’ Winston says. ‘Is everything all right?’

Will looks up at Winston through glassy eyes, his old friend and butler a blur through them. ‘No, Winston, no, it’s not. I am afraid we must leave. With as little fuss as possible and as quickly as we can.’

‘But Sir, the Count?’

‘I will speak with him, but please can you pack as much as you can. Leave everything the Count purchased.’

‘But, Sir…’

‘Winston, I know I have asked much of you these last few years, but I must ask this of you now.’

‘Of course,’ Winston says. ‘May I be permitted to say one thing?’

‘Yes, of course, but it won’t change my mind.’

‘I just wanted to say that I do not think my lady would have begrudged you your happiness.’

‘Perhaps not, my dear Winston, but not when it comes at the expense of her son.’

***

He waited until everything was packed, and the carriage was waiting for him. Winston, as always, had been quick and efficient, not saying a word to Will the entire time they gathered his belongings. Will had decided to leave everything Hannibal had given him. He needed to make a clean break. As he looked around the room, he sighs as he remembers the picture in the drawer. He picks it up and looks at Molly’s sweet face. He needs to be strong. He puts it in his pocket and takes one last look at the room. One last look at the bed where he and Hannibal had spent those hours, that first night together locked in an embrace. He sees the vial still on the side. Before he can even think, he drinks it down.

The walk to Hannibal’s bedroom seems to take forever. Slow footsteps in the brightening morning light, his hand hovers over the doorknob before finally opening it. Hannibal sits up the moment Will enters. The alpha had clearly fallen back asleep but is roused when Will’s scent wafted into the room. He takes one last deep breath of the alpha’s scent, and his, still mingling in the air, before fully entering and closing the door behind him.

‘Will, is everything all right? How is Walt?’ Hannibal gets out of bed and hastily pulls on his robe, making his way towards Will.

He stops him from getting closer by putting his hand out. ‘I’m sorry, Hannibal, I have to leave.’

‘What? What has happened? Where is Walt?’

‘He left,’ Will says, willing his eyes to look up at Hannibal. The wave of concern from the alpha makes him feel nauseous. ‘I have to leave. We can’t do this.’

‘Can’t do what? Tell me what happened. We can get through anything you and I,’ Hannibal says and tries to move closer, Will takes a step back.

‘I was wrong. I can’t do this. We can’t be together. My life is not my own, Hannibal. I have responsibilities, obligations, to Molly, to Walt, I can’t forget them.’

‘Will, calm down, tell me what happened, what did Walt say?’

‘He said that I was betraying him and his mother, that he could not be with Abigail if we were together. Don’t you see, Hannibal? He’s right. I knew he was, I knew it was wrong, but then you….’

‘I what, convinced you? Led you astray? You wanted this as much as I.’ Hannibal’s voice is soft, but there are daggers beneath it gleaming.

‘I am to blame. I should have taken the suppressant the moment I felt my heat; I shouldn’t have let biology take over.’

‘That is what you think? You think all this is, all I feel, all you feel is just biology? You know me, I have allowed you into my life, my heart, and you cannot feel it.’

Will can feel it. He can feel everything. All of him aches for Hannibal. Every moment of every day, he needs and wants the alpha. The thought of being without him is even more unfathomable than the loss of his wife.

‘Yes, that’s all it was, that’s all it can ever be, just biology, Hannibal,’ Will says, and he can see the hurt spring to Hannibal’s eyes. ‘There is no choice, I’m sorry. I’m going back to Trap Manor,’ Will turns and walks towards the door.

‘That’s it! After everything we have said, everything we have done, you are just leaving. You won’t fight for us?’

‘There is nothing to fight, Hannibal. I cannot betray Walt, and I cannot forget Molly.’

‘I never asked you to,’ Hannibal says, and Will can sense he has stepped closer.

‘I know, but we can’t. It’s over.’

‘Will,’ Hannibal says, and it makes him stop just for a moment, hand hovering over the door handle. ‘Wait, a moment, please.’ Hannibal then takes a step even closer to him and places a hand on his shoulder, the weight and warmth he can feel through his jacket. Will closes his eyes and breathes out a stuttered breath as Hannibal says, ‘Omega, let me fix this.’

The word catches Will off guard. As if it has been sewn into his muscles, his veins, his very soul. His whole body vibrates at the sound of it. The sound of that word from Hannibal’s lips makes his legs go to jelly, unsteady. He stumbles a little, and Hannibal, of course, as was probably his intent, catches him with a strong arm around his waist. The broad strength of Hannibal’s chest is hot against his back, just as it was in the carriage, just as it was during his heat. The memory of their closeness floods his mind, and he whimpers. He hates himself for the whimper. He hates his body for remembering its omegan responses. The ones he thought were long dead, the ones, if he was honest, he wondered if he had ever truly had. Now, he

knows he did. He does. Hannibal is bringing every single one of them to the surface, and it burns him.

‘You are an omega, Will. You could be mine, if you allowed it,’ Hannibal’s words once again take the breath from his lungs. He keeps his eyes squeezed shut, willing this moment to end but also hoping with every fibre of his being that Hannibal never lets him go.

‘I can’t,’ he hears himself say. ‘We can’t, ever, be that, it’s not….’

‘It’s not what, Will? It’s not what you want? Tell me that, tell me it’s not what you want, and I’ll let you leave.’ Will knows Hannibal means it. ‘Open your eyes, turn around, look at me, tell me.’

Before he can even respond, Hannibal has turned Will around in his arms. The only thing holding Will up is Hannibal’s embrace. His arms hang weakly at his sides, and he refuses to open his eyes. He knows if he does, he will not be able to tell Hannibal what he must. He wills his legs to stand. He manages to gain back a little balance in Hannibal’s insistent embrace. He places a hand on the alpha’s chest to push him away a fraction.

Eventually, Will opens his eyes and is met with deep pools of red he once more wants to dive into.

‘Omega, tell me you don’t want this, tell me you don’t need this as much as I,’ Hannibal says. The word need makes Will bite his lower lip.

‘We can’t, Hannibal,’ Will says, refusing to say the word he wants to. The word he has uttered and moaned in the throws of passion more than once.

Hannibal leans in, pushing Will’s hand, so it is trapped between them. ‘You can’t tell me because you know you want this.’

The alpha’s hold him up with one arm. His other hand reaches towards Will’s hair and then down his face. Will leans into the touch, he can’t help his body’s reactions, and most of him doesn’t even want to fight. Then he remembers that Walt and Abigail, he knows this cannot be, he made a promise to Molly to take care of him, to make sure he was happy. He remembers Walt’s face, the betrayal the boy felt, the hurt in his voice. This, between them, it cannot be, not while Abigail and Walt are together, not while Walt disapproves so strongly. It was just one heat. He can get over this if he stops it now. He needs to get over this. He wills his body to calm. He needs to gain control of his biology. He knows he can. He has done it before. He hopes the suppressant will kick in and help him soon.

‘I want to kiss you,’ Hannibal says, and it makes Will moan. How he hates that moan. ‘Let me kiss you once more and then tell me it's over.’

‘No, let me go, please, Hannibal, alpha, let me go,’ Will can see the moment he utters the word “alpha” Hannibal’s eyes widen and deepen in colour. He remembers moaning alpha in pleasure, making Hannibal look at him like that while inside him. Will feels the heat between them. His body shakes with the knowledge of how good it felt. He wants to give in. He wants to just do something for himself, allow himself pleasure and perhaps just a little bit of pain.

He thinks of the monster in his dreams, the ecstasy, the agony. He wants it all. He knows Hannibal can give it to him.

‘You called me alpha,’ Hannibal’s words rush from him in a growl and causing him to hold Will even tighter.

‘Yes,’ Will sighs as he closes his eyes again. He can feel tears pressing up against his eyelids. ‘Yes.’

‘Because you know that I am, that I am yours and you are mine, you can’t walk away from this,’ Hannibal is so close now, their lips almost touching, and Will wants to kiss him, let him in, but he knows the moment he does he will never be able to walk away. Even this is torture.

‘We can’t. You have to accept this,’ Will manages as tears fall from his eyes.

‘No, I don’t,’ Hannibal growls and leans in to kiss him. Will pushes him away, one hard shove that manages to get Hannibal off balance, and the alpha stumbles back, finally letting Will go.

He turns and opens the door. ‘I’m sorry, Hannibal, I really am,’ Will says.

‘Will, if you leave now, I won’t chase you. We promised we would do this together, get through it together. I can give you that, if you stay, now. I promise I will never leave you. But if you run away from us, from this, that’s it.’ Will can hear the crack in Hannibal’s voice, and he knows if he turns around, he will not be able to leave. He takes one last deep breath and walks out of the door.

Chapter End Notes

comments are the way Will breathes in their scents for the last time and kudos is Hannibal's trembling voice.

so sorry, have a virtual hug! Trust me it hurt me more to write it!
xxx

See you next week xxx

The Betrayal

Chapter Summary

‘Did you know?’ Walt says as Margot appears, hastily dressed, closely followed by Alana.

‘Did I know what?’ Margot says. ‘What on earth is the matter?’ They are in the drawing-room of the house. Walt had found his way here after leaving Will. He had walked the streets for a few hours, trying to order his thoughts. Last night when he saw them together, he told himself he must not have seen what he thought he saw. Then he would catch glimpses of them through the evening, standing that little bit closer, never apart, always looking at each other, and he had wondered how he hadn’t seen it. He had tried his best to push it all away and focus on Abi. Dancing with her had calmed him, but she had sensed something was wrong, and he denied it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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‘Hannibal and Will,’ Walt says he can hardly say the two names together. Betrayal still stings in his mouth.

‘What about them?’ Alana says.

‘They are…well… together…or whatever it is you call it. Will had a… a… a heat and Hannibal and he…’. Walt can’t even finish the sentence. To think of them together is just too much. He cannot even allow his mind to go there. The idea of Will going through a heat, with Hannibal, it’s just more than his mind can comprehend right now. Molly’s face is all he can see. He is sure she would be outraged.

‘Walt, calm down, tell us what on earth is happening!’ Alana exclaims as she ushers them all to the couch.

‘I did know,’ Margot says. ‘I knew last night. It was only by accident. They wanted to speak to you first. I assume Will has spoken with you now.’

Walt looks up at his Aunt and is shocked. ‘Only because I caught them in an embrace at the ball.’

‘Walt, my love,’ Alana says. ‘I am sure they did not mean for you to find out that way. Please calm down and explain what is so upsetting.’

‘I can’t believe you knew!’ Walt says, still staring at Margot. How could she be so calm about this! ‘I suppose you encouraged it!’

‘I want Will to be happy, he deserves it, and you’ve seen how much better Will has been these past few months, his health has returned, and that is down to Hannibal, I cannot believe you would begrudge him this, Walt, after everything he has done for you.’ Margot says firmly.

‘What do you mean?’ Walt says. ‘What about my mother?’

‘I am afraid I am playing catch up here,’ Alana says. ‘Hannibal and Will are a couple? Are they getting married?’

‘Hannibal has asked, Will and he spent a heat together,’ Walt cannot look his Aunts in the eyes as he speaks. To speak of such things makes him feel queasy.

‘So that was why they were so close, and his fever, ahh yes I see, was not exactly a fever,’ Alana says.

‘It’s a betrayal,’ Walt says.

‘A betrayal?’ Alana asks. ‘Of who?’

‘Of mother! Of me!’

‘My dear Walt, Molly, was my sister, so allow me an opinion,’ Alana says.

Walt nods, conceding to his Aunt.

‘Molly was very happily married to Will. He provided her with companionship and security after believing it impossible. The marriage to your father was arranged by our father, who was not so much concerned with our happiness as with money. Molly was the eldest, so she had to be the first to marry, and as an alpha, she was to inherit the estate. Francis was a good match on paper. He came from a good house. His father was a Lord and a close friend of our father. But, Walt, you must know he was not a good man, and I feared for my dear sister every day of her marriage and even more so after you were born. I know we do not speak of him, as was her wish, but you are a man now, and you need to know the full story.’

Walt has pieced together parts of what happened with his father but never the full picture. Will refused to speak of it, and Winston, too, none of the household staff would say a word to him about it. His mother’s wishes had been clear. Even when she was alive, she refused to

speak of him. He had no memories of his father. He had believed Will to be his father until told otherwise by Molly. He wasn't even sure if his father was still alive. None of it had mattered until now. If his father is still alive, this could change things. He nods, and Alana begins to speak.

'He was cruel and violent to your mother. He was a drunk, and an angry one at that. She lived her life in fear of him. We all did. It was a blessing when he went missing. He was drinking at the pub and was not seen again, probably got into a fight or owed the wrong people. Detective Crawford looked into it for a while, but after the months passed, we all started to relax and realise he was gone. Crawford had him declared dead so your future would be safe. Your mother had struck up a friendship with Will. At the time, he was a tenant on your mother's land before the last was sold to the Wolf Estate. He had helped her one evening after a bad fight with your father, taken her in and patched her up. This was before you were born. Will was kind to her; he understood what it was like to have an abusive person in your life. His childhood was not happy. He saw in her a kindred spirit, and he saw in your potential. He saved her. He married her after your father's death, therefore, ensuring your safety and hers. She never lived a day in fear again because of Will, and you were given the gift of a safe and loving home, as well as a father who loved you more than anything in the world and still does. The kind of father who puts your happiness in front of his own. Now, you deny the man who brought you up, who cared for you, who helped you, who lived for you when many others would have died from the bond sickness he survived, any kind of happiness. You are selfish beyond reason.'

Walt hears her words, and they sting. 'I do not deny him his happiness, just why did it have to be Hannibal? I don't think of him as an omega. I thought he was too old.'

'Too old for happiness,' Margot says. 'Is there an age limit on joy? Oh Walt, listen to yourself! You may have forgotten who Will is, and I think Will did too, but Hannibal didn't. He sees Will for who he is and loves him. How can you stand in the way of that?'

'Because it's not… .it's not right… what will people think?' Walt says. 'How will Abi and I ever be together now? It was bad enough that people would think I'm not good enough, but now? Now it will be even worse!'

'I know Will did not raise you to care about what other people think!' Alana says. 'I know my sister never did, and she would be ashamed that you do. She married for others, and she married for love, and you know which one turned out better for her.'

'It's not that simple!' Walt protests.

'Yes, yes it is, Walt,' Margot says.

'What about Abigail! What will she think of this?!' Walt says he had been too angry to tell her last night, and this morning, he had gone straight to see Will.

'Have you spoken with her?' Margot asks.

'No, I was too angry.'

‘Oh, Walt! Poor Will, he must be beside himself.’ Margot says.

‘He should have told me!’ Walt says.

‘Perhaps, but there has been a lot going on, Walt, and I imagine all of this was new and scary for him. You must allow him some leeway for that,’ Alana reasons.

‘I cannot help the way I feel!’ Walt says and stands up, beginning to pace the room. ‘It feels wrong to me! I believe what you say about my father, I had put much of it together myself, and of course, I am thankful for Will for everything he has done, but my mother gave him a better life too! She gave him a better home, status, that counts for something, doesn’t it?’

Alana sighs. ‘Yes, yes, of course, it does, but that doesn’t mean Will is not allowed to move on. Molly would not have wanted Will to be lonely and unhappy for the rest of his life.’

‘How do you know she would have wanted him to move on like this? With Hannibal? The guardian of the woman I plan to marry! You cannot tell me she would have approved.’

‘Can you hear yourself?’ Margot says, her voice beginning to rise. Alana soothes her hand and continues.

‘I knew my sister, and I know Will. He would do anything for you, Walt. I imagine that Molly never thought about Will moving on with anyone else. She was worried he would not survive her death. She had hoped he would, we had all hoped and prayed he would, and when he did, we were so relieved as it meant you could stay in your family home and be brought by the man your mother chose as your father. If she had thought he could be with someone else, I do not think she would have objected.’

‘But you don’t know that!’ Walt says, turning on his heels. ‘What about Trap Manor? She fought for the estate, she kept as much of it going as she could, and now it will all be a part of Wolf Estate again. This is not just about who Will wants to… run around with!’

‘Run around with?!’ Margot says and is once more calmed by Alana.

‘Walt, I know that. Of course, I know that, but can’t you see that you need to talk to Will and Hannibal.’

‘I have spoken to Will!’

‘What did he say?’ Alana asks.

‘That he and Hannibal spent a heat together, that they are going to be married. He didn’t even apologise!’

‘Why would he? Zounds, Walt!’ Margot says, batting away Alana’s hand and standing. ‘You are acting like a child!’

‘Margot,’ Alana objects, but Margot ignores her.

‘Walt, what did you say to Will?’ Margot asks, her voice a cold tone.

‘I told him how I felt, that he had betrayed me, my mother, and that I would never forgive him for it.’

‘You selfish prig!’ Margot says and slaps Walt before he can stop her. He brings his hand to his stinging cheek before turning and walking away from them.

***

Abigail had woken up late. She had a restless night, her mind racing after all the excitement of the ball. Bedelia had even allowed her a glass of champagne. The evening had been magical. Dancing with Walt for all to see had made her cheeks hurt from smiling. Finally, they could be together. He would surely see now that there was no reason for them not to announce their engagement to the world. Hannibal had been beaming with pride at her, and Will had looked dashing next to him. It was clear to her they were meant to be. She hoped now they could all be happy.

Even through the happiness, Walt had seemed off, fine at first, but after following Will out of the ball, he had come back flushed and distracted, he had denied it, of course, but she knew him better than he knew himself. She had shrugged it off best she could and enjoyed the rest of the night. This morning though, she felt as if something had shifted. She stretches and gets out of bed, and a cold feeling slithers down her spine. Something is not right with Hannibal. She can sense it. Throwing on her dressing gown, she leaves her room and runs to Hannibal’s.

‘Papa!’ She shouts as she knocks on the door. ‘Papa! Are you alright?’

There is nothing from inside. She goes to open the door, but something stops her. She knocks again and quietens her panic. ‘Papa? I had a bad feeling. Please give me a word you are alright.’

After what seems like an eternity, she hears movement and a whisper through the wood of the door.

‘I am fine, Abigail. Please go back to bed.’

She tries the door, but it won’t budge. Her guardian is pushing against it. ‘Let me in. What is wrong?’

‘Nothing is wrong, dear one, please go back to bed.’

‘No,’ she says. She can be stubborn when she wants, something everyone knows about her, including her guardian. ‘Not until you tell me what’s wrong.’

‘Do as I say for once, Abigail,’ Hannibal says.

‘What did you tell me after my parents died?’ She says and hears Hannibal sigh. ‘Tell me. What did you say?’

Eventually, she hears the words he said the day. ‘That I was your father now, that I would never leave you, that we were a family now.’

‘Yes, and that means I am never going to leave you either. So I am going to stay here until you tell me what is wrong.’ She thinks for a moment. ‘Shall I get Will? Would you tell him if not me?’

At the mention of Will, she hears her guardian make a strange, low moan. ‘No.’

‘Is that what is wrong? Something to do with Will?’ She says and knows in her heart it must be. It would explain Walt’s odd behaviour. Did Walt object? How could he? Surely he is not the type of man to stand in the way of his guardian’s happiness? Not when everything is going so well. ‘What happened?’

‘Will left.’

Abigail’s heart sinks, and a wave of cold anger begins to swell in her chest. ‘It was Walt, wasn’t it?’ There is a pause and in that hesitation is all the answer she needs. ‘I’ll kill him.’

***

Walt left his Aunts in a fit of rage. How could they not understand why he was upset? This was more complicated than they seemed to want to admit. He had once more roamed the street to try and calm down. He wanted to see Abi, her face the only thing that would make him feel better, but he knew he needed to calm down first. Unsure how many hours pass before he finally manages to find his way to Hannibal’s large house. He paces outside, trying to find the courage to go inside. He doesn’t want to see Hannibal right now. He is not sure what he would do if he did. He doesn’t want to see Will.

Eventually, he decides to go around the back, where he had met Abi just a few weeks ago when they all first came to the city. They had pressed up against the wall and kissed. He needs the feeling of his body against hers right now, the only balm that can soothe him. She will understand, she will share his outrage, she will comfort him, and they will get through this together.

The house is dark and quiet, which surprises him. Usually, the servants are up and bustling about from dawn. He takes a deep breath and rings the bell. He hopes that Winston does not answer. He is not sure he can face his mother’s old butler right now. There is no answer, and he can hear nothing from inside. He peers inside the window but can make out only darkness. He rings the bell again, for longer and louder. Eventually, he hears movement from inside and the door is opened a crack. Chiyoh peers through, eyes narrowing when she sees him.

‘Is Mistress Abigail available?’ he says.

‘What do you want with her?’ Chiyoh responds icily.

‘I just need to speak with her. I can wait here. I don’t need to come in.’

‘Who said you could?’

‘Chiyoh, you know me, what is wrong?’

‘You know very well what is wrong, Master Walt.’

‘Can you please just tell Abigail I am here,’ Walt pleads as he begins to panic about what Chiyoh’s reaction to him could mean.

‘Wait,’ she says and closes the door. He hears it lock behind her.

He paces the small courtyard for what seems like forever before the door is finally opened again. Abi is standing there, a beacon in the darkness, her flawless skin shining, her blue eyes piercing. Yet, there is no sweet smile on her lips for him, and that normally beautiful pale skin is flushed with anger. He stops in his tracks as he goes to her.

‘Abi!’ he says. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘I had hoped it was not true, that somehow papa had gotten it wrong, that you were not the reason for all this. But now I can see, one look at you, and I know it.’

‘Abi! What do you mean?’

‘You know what I mean.’

‘Will and Hannibal?’ He says that betrayal beginning to sting again. ‘You knew!’

‘Knew what?’

‘That they were together!’

‘I knew that my papa was the happiest I had seen him in years and that Will was looking more youthful by the day. I knew they made each other happy.’

‘You approve?’

‘By approve, you mean I do not stand in the way of the man who saved me? The man who gave me a life I could never have dreamed of, even before my parent’s death, who took me in from a fate on the streets and gave me everything I have ever asked for and wanted nothing but my love in return. I would not begrudge Hannibal anything. I thought when I met you, you understood. You, too, lost a parent. You, too, were brought up by a selfless, loving man. I believed you to be modelled in Will’s image. Instead, all I see is a selfish child who cares for nothing but himself. You are not the man I fell in love with. I have no idea who you are.’

‘Abi, you must see this is not about me! This is about my mother! Her legacy, her memory, she would be so betrayed by this.’

‘You have one thing right, Walt. She would be betrayed but not by Will. By you, a son she loved, a son she left in the care of a man she loved. She wanted you both to be happy. I cannot even look at you.’

She starts to close the door, and he stops her. Her icy gaze makes him smart.

‘Abi, please! Listen to me, give me a chance to explain how I feel.’

‘Explain that because of you and your selfish, childish ways, my papa is bereft and locked in his room. The only man he has ever loved gone.’

‘Will left,’ Walt says.

‘Yes, he left the moment you did. The very thought he had hurt you destroyed you. As always, he placed your need ahead of his own. And for what? Walt, tell me that? You had everything last night, and now you have nothing.’ She slams the door in his face.

Chapter End Notes

Hold on dear readers we are in for a bumpy ride! More next week.

Comments are Margot's slap of Walt's face and kudos is the sound of the door slamming in Walt's face....

An old comfort

Chapter Summary

‘What kind of choice was it? To choose between his ward, the boy who is all but his son, and the man he loves? It was an impossible choice. What would you have done if Abigail hadn’t approved?’

‘I would have stayed. I wouldn’t have run away.’

‘I am not so sure, Hannibal. You don’t have the ghost of a wife on your back either. Will carries a lot of guilt. He has been through so much. He has spent a lifetime giving of himself to others. It is a habit now, one he cannot break. His first instinct is to protect. That is part of being an omega too.’

Hannibal knows Bedelia may be right, but the hurt is so raw. His mind is clouded, his thoughts scattered.

‘It doesn’t matter now. He made his choice.’

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the lateness! I hope it's worth the wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail is pacing in her room when there is a knock at the door. She looks at the door in an accusatory manner. Whoever is behind it is no one she wants to see. Unless it’s Papa, she hopes and says ‘Yes?’

‘Abigail?’ The voice behind it says.

‘Bedelia?’ She responds.

‘Please, darling, let me in,’ she hears Bedelia say in her smooth voice. She frowns but knows better than to think Bedelia is going to go anywhere. The woman is as stubborn as Abigail.

‘Come in,’ she says.

Bedelia enters, and Abigail manages to keep it together for a moment before melting into a pool of tears as Bedelia gathers her up in her arms, leading her to the chair by the fire.

‘Abigail, please, take a breath, tell me what has happened?’

‘It’s Walt. He’s ruined everything! Poor Papa won’t come out of his room!’

‘Abigail, just tell me what happened.’

Between sobs, Abigail manages to get most of the story out. Bedelia stands, for a moment, before sitting down.

‘I see,’ Bedelia says and sighs. ‘This connection between Hannibal and he is more than I thought.’

‘Papa loves Will, and he loves Papa. They were so happy together before Walt ruined it all!’

‘I fear I misjudged Will. The man is willing to risk his health for the sake of his ward and you, then I do believe I have got this all wrong. I must confess something to you.’

‘What is it? Oh, Bedelia, I don’t think I can take any more bad news!’ Abigail says as her tears start again. How could this day get any worse?! she thinks as she buries her face in her hands.

‘Oh my darling, it’s all right. I promise you that I will do everything in my power to fix all of this! I can promise you that. But I want to be honest. I want there to be no secrets between us.’

Abigail looks at Bedelia. ‘I don’t know how you can fix this.’

‘I have a few ideas, but first, let me tell you what happened at the ball.’

‘What did you do?’ Abigail says she knows Bedelia did not approve of Will or Walt, that she may have been coming round to them, but she still did not trust them. Her face dropped when Hannibal permitted Abigail to dance with Walt.

‘I was, rather, well, indelicate towards Will.’

Abigail groans. ‘What did you say?’

‘I implied that, perhaps, he used his heat as a way to lure Hannibal, to entrap him.’

‘Oh, Bedelia! How could you? Was that why Will stormed out?’

‘Yes, I believe so. But Hannibal went after him, and they returned together, so I assumed all was well. Hannibal gave me a warning look, and I decided to leave it for the night and just enjoy your night. Watching you dance and be so happy was a balm to me. I can see now how wrong I was about both of them, and I can promise you I will do everything I can to rectify this.’

‘I know you just wanted to protect us. It doesn’t matter anymore, Walt scared Will off, and I cannot forgive him for it. Nothing you can do will change any of this! After everything Hannibal has done for Walt, for him to turn around and treat him like this is unforgivable.’

‘I know you feel that way now, my darling, and I understand, I really do, but you must try and see this from Walt’s view. His mother was very important to him, and he loves you. He wants to do right by you. I imagine he worries about what people will say about you two if Will and Hannibal were to marry.’

‘I don’t care about that! Why should he? If he loves me, that should be all that matters!’

‘Oh my darling, young men are delicate creatures. Their egos are as easily shattered as glass. Not to mention you are an alpha, and above him in social circles, he has a lot to prove, and he wants to be worthy of you. I admire that about him. He is just upset right now. He will calm down and realise the mistake he has made.’

‘But what if it’s too late? What if Will gets really sick again?’

‘We have limited time, I agree. I had not realised how close he and Hannibal had become. If Hannibal is heartbroken, then I imagine Will must also be. We need to fix this and as quickly as possible. Before I go to see Hannibal, I need to ask you some questions about Walt, see if we can figure a way of making him listen.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Is there anyone who he would listen to? Anyone he would trust? What about his Aunts?’

‘He is furious with them also, I think. Margot knew and didn’t tell him.’

‘Right, so they are off the table. What about that butler of Will’s? Didn’t he help Will through his sickness the first time? Is he close with Walt as well?’

‘He has gone back with Will. We would have to get him to come here or Walt to go there, and Winston will be busy looking after Will, I imagine.’

‘Anyone else? Think Abigail, someone he has not seen for a while, someone he has a connection to that would be able to pull him out of this?’

Abigail wracks her mind, thinking of all those conversations she and Walt had at the lake. They told each other everything. ‘Yes! There is one person, but I have no idea where she is now.’

‘I can find anyone. Who, tell me.’

***

After Abigail left, Hannibal closed the curtains shutting out any light. Everything seemed too bright. Now he is shivering and yet feels too hot at the same time. The room still smells of Will, the sheets, the bed, everywhere. He wants to leave his body, leave everything, just not exist anymore. He ends up slumped against the wall, his body slides down, and he ends up sitting with his back against the panelling, knees bent, hugging himself. The last conversation he had with Will plays over and over again in his mind, the words echoing and hitting the

inside of his skull, giving him a headache. When he closes his eyes, all he can see is Will, standing there, pale and distraught, the sight of his back as he left, the sound of the door as it shut. Abigail's voice had brought him back to earth briefly, but even that had seemed like a stab to his heart. He knows she will reject Walt now and will be as devastated by all this as he. At least she is young. There is hope for her yet. For him, there is nothing. He was happy before he met Will Graham. He was happy with his life, but now that he has glimpsed what could have been, all of it seems so pointless.

The knock on his door makes him jump. He does not answer. The knock happens again, and this time it is accompanied by a voice, one he did not expect.

'Hannibal,' Bedelia says. 'Please let me in.'

He sighs. He knows she will not leave until he does. He was angry at her last night for what she said to Will, but now he is more angry at Will for leaving him, for not trusting the bond they have. He slowly gets up from the floor and walks to the door, sighing. He opens it, allowing Bedelia inside.

The sight of him seems to shock her. He runs a hand through his hair, which is out of its usually tidy ponytail. He pulls his dressing gown tighter around himself.

'Oh, Hannibal!' She says once inside, he closes the door behind her, shutting out the light from the hall. She goes to open the curtains, but he stops her.

'Please, don't. The light, it hurts my eyes.'

She lights one of the oil lamps, guiding Hannibal to sit with her on the chairs by the cold, empty fire.

'I am so sorry, Hannibal, Abigail has told me everything,' Bedelia says, her voice as soft as he has ever heard it.

He runs a hand over his face at the mention of Abigail. 'How is she? Has she seen Walt?'

'Yes, she sent him away.'

'I thought she might,' Hannibal says. He is aware he needs to check on his ward, pull himself out of this, and make sure she is all right, yet he cannot order his thoughts. Getting up off the floor to let Bedelia in took what last energy he had.

'How do you feel?' Bedelia asks, leaning forward attempting to place a hand on his knee.

He bats her hand away, and she sits back in the chair. 'Is Abigail alright?' he asks,

'Yes, I think so, for now,' Bedelia says. 'I will take care of her. I have a plan to help her and Walt figure all this out. You need to go to Will. You must see that?'

'I can't,' Hannibal says. 'He doesn't want me. He left, I told him it was over if he left, and he did.'

‘Hannibal, you can take it back. You must try, you must.’

‘No, no, I can’t. You should tell Abigail to speak to Walt. There is no reason why she should be unhappy as well as me.’

‘I fear it is not that simple. She will not consider taking Walt back until you, and Will are together.’

‘It doesn’t have to be that way,’ Hannibal says.

‘You will need to tell her that. Look at you, Hannibal, you cannot go on like this and think what state he will be in, what if he doesn’t survive this?’

Hannibal knows this. He knew the moment Will left, it was likely the omega had signed his own death warrant. ‘It was his choice.’

‘What kind of choice was it? To choose between his ward, the boy who is all but his son, and the man he loves? It was an impossible choice. What would you have done if Abigail hadn’t approved?’

‘I would have stayed. I wouldn’t have run away.’

‘I am not so sure, Hannibal. You don’t have the ghost of a wife on your back either. Will carries a lot of guilt. He has been through so much. He has spent a lifetime giving of himself to others. It is a habit now, one he cannot break. His first instinct is to protect. That is part of being an omega too.’

Hannibal knows Bedelia may be right, but the hurt is so raw. His mind is clouded, his thoughts scattered.

‘It doesn’t matter now. He made his choice.’

‘How can you say that?’

‘Bedelia, I appreciate you coming, but I would prefer to be left alone. Please, take Abigail to stay with you for a few days. She doesn’t need to be around me when I’m like this.’

‘Hannibal, you cannot hide away from this. You cannot push everyone away, especially Abigail.’

‘I just need some time,’ Hannibal says, and he wants it to be true. He wants to think that in a few days, he will be over this feeling, this cavernous hole left by Will.

‘No, you need Will, and he needs you.’

‘It wasn’t meant to be. I thought you would be pleased,’ Hannibal says.

Bedelia actually looks hurt. ‘I know I said some things I shouldn’t, and I am sorry for that, truly. I misjudged Will as I have misjudged you.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, look at you, it’s pathetic, Hannibal. You have just let the only person, besides Abigail and I, you have ever been close to out of your life. You are about to be alone, again, when Abigail leaves to begin her life with Walt or someone else. What will happen then? You will be alone.’

‘You are alone,’ Hannibal says, not meaning to be cruel. Bedelia has always led a solitary life, not that she hasn’t had offers, but no one ever stuck. It was why they were always drawn to each other, two lone alphas happy with their own company, happy with their secrets.

‘I have you and Abigail, and that is all I need. I have never found what you did with Will. I was never capable of it, but you, Hannibal, you are, you have shown you are, and you have thrown it away.’

‘I didn’t throw it away. He did. I wanted to fight for us.’

‘What are you doing now? This does not look like fighting. This is you giving up. Abigail needs you right now; she needs the man who lifted her out of the darkness and gave her a better life, not this pathetic shell I see before me.’ Bedelia stands up. He watches her as her words sting. ‘I will take Abigail, and I will fix her and Walt, but you need to fix things with Will, I mean it, Hannibal. I will be back, and I want you out of this room when I return.’

***

Walt had eventually gone home to his small lodgings. Lying on his bed, he had stared up at the ceiling until the light of the following day had risen, sunlight streaming in and making the room too hot. He had gotten up, still wearing the same clothes and made his way into the too bright street, wandering around. He had found himself in the park. It was still early, not many people about as he sat on a bench beside the duck pond, watching the little creature swim about with not a care in the world. He thought about Abi, all those conversations they had by the lake back home. The summer had seemed to go on forever. Now there was a chill in the air in the morning, frost trying to gather. He can still hear the sound of her voice as she read to him, absently twirling her parasol as he skimmed rocks on the surface of the water. Birdsong and her lilting tone were all he could hear.

Their first kiss after Will had broken his leg. He had snuck to her room later at night, creeping about the house like a thief he had knocked on her door. He still remembers the look on her face when she answered, a shawl hastily wrapped around her bare, pale shoulders, her long, soft brown hair scattered about her face. She had looked like a dream. He had whispered, asked to come in, just for a moment. She had looked shy, almost coy, before stepping aside to allow him in. He had kissed her the moment the door closed, his hands in her hair, the darkness thick around them. There had only been them at that moment. The whole world had fallen away. They had whispered each others names and promises between sweet kisses. He longs for that moment back. He longs for it all back.

He closes his eyes, and all he can see now is her anger and hurt. Her face when she shut the door. She had been crying, he could tell, her eyes were red. How he had wanted to bang on that door and plead for her to allow him just one more moment, one more kiss. His pride and

anger had swallowed the impulse, though, and he had, instead, walked away, fury burning in each step. Now he sits here alone, no Abigail, no Will, no Alana or Margot.

‘Walt? Is that you?’ A voice says from in front of him. He opens his eyes. The sun shines and blocks his view. He holds a hand up to shade himself.

Stood there like a mirage is a woman he has not seen for years but would never fail to recognise. He thinks he imagines it at first until she takes a step forward. ‘It’s me, Beverly, your Nurse. You must remember, or has it been that long?’

He smiles, an impulse he was not sure he still had. ‘Of course, how could I forget you!’ He stands up and takes her hand. ‘How strange it is to see you here, now.’

Bev laughs as he kisses her hand and lets it go. ‘You are so grown, but I would recognise those eyes anywhere. My dear boy, what are you doing in the city?’

‘I am working, at a law firm, actually.’

‘Oh, how wonderful, your mother would be so proud. Are you staying with your Aunts?’

‘No, I have a small lodging, close to the office.’

‘How grown up of you! Let me look at you! I must commit this to memory!’ she says and looks him up and down. She gets to his eyes and puts a hand on his shoulder. ‘My dear, have you been crying? Now that I see you, you look distraught, sit back down, tell me what has happened.’

Walt allows Bev to guide him back to the bench. She sits next to him, grasping his hand tightly. It is as if the years they have not seen each other melt away. It is so easy to talk to his old NurseNurse, just as he did when he was a boy when he would cry for his mother and Will was too ill to comfort him. Bev had been the one who had stroked his hair and sung to him. Her gentle strength was always a comfort. She had stayed with them until Walt was old enough and didn’t need her anymore. They had stayed in touch at first, but as life got busier, the letters had become less and less, as is the way with growing up. She was often in his thoughts, though, and he is so happy to see her, now, of all moments. He tells her everything. She listens, taking in every word he says.

‘No-one understands why I am so upset; I know that I could have handled it better, but I cannot help how I feel,’ Walt says as Bev looks away for a moment. He can see she is letting everything that he has told her sink in. She had not reacted a lot to his tale, just nodded and hummed a few times. Walt cannot tell what she is thinking.

‘Will has gone now, back to Trap manor?’ she asks.

‘Yes, that’s what Abigail told me.’

‘He and this Count, are they bonded?’

‘Not officially, but they have become very close, Will was doing better, it’s true, but they are not bonded, I don’t think, not yet.’

‘But they have a connection. They spent a heat together?’

‘Yes,’ Walt says and tries to push the image away.

‘Do you remember much from just after your mother passed?’ Bev asks.

‘I remember some of it, a lot I think I blocked out. I remember that Will was locked in his room, sleeping, that you all tried to keep me away from his sickness as much as you could, made sure I wasn’t alone.’

‘Yes, we did our best, and of course, your Aunts were there to help. They stayed for almost a year on and off. Winston looked after Will more than anyone, but he needed to sleep sometimes, so I would often take shifts watching over Will. I don’t think he knows that. He was so delirious I doubt he remembers.’

‘He was delirious?’

‘The bond sickness came on fast. Faster and more intense than we thought. Molly had barely been buried, and Will was fading. At the funeral, he could hardly stand. He managed to keep it together. I have no idea how, so he could be by your side. But after that, he was bedridden for at least months. We almost lost him. I didn’t think he was going to make it. I am not telling you this to make you feel guilty, Walt. I just want you to realise that Will survived what no other omega I know of has. His bond with your mother was real. It was strong. It literally almost killed him. Do you understand that? He loved your mother so much he almost died.’

‘I know that,’ Walt admits.

‘It’s not just that, though Walt, his love for your mother almost killed him, but do you know what kept him alive? What kept that stubborn heart of his beating through the pain, and yes, there was physical pain, for him it would have felt as if his very heart was being torn from his chest, in a real sense. He would scream until he passed out, clawing at his chest to make it stop. The doctor could only give him so much relief. His body just had to go through the withdrawal. It was a long, agonising process. In the end, there was always one word on his lips, one name he would utter between the wracking sobs and screams. Your name. It was you and the thought of you being alone that kept Will alive. That is a responsibility you bear. I am not sure you realise that. You saved him, Will’s love for you, saved him.

‘Now you are grown and starting to live your own life. You will not need Will for much longer. You will start your own family and not be alone. Whether that is with Abigail, or not, you will find someone. Will is the one that is going to be left alone. So even though he knew this, he knew that his survival would be temporary, that once you were grown, he would be obsolete. His reason for staying alive would be no longer. Bond sickness is connected to emotion as much as it is to biology. Will’s heart never healed, not fully. He managed to piece enough of it back together so he could stay alive for a few more years to be with you. He has been suffering these past years; he takes medicine to help with the pain, the aches and creaks of old age, of being older than he should be. He has always known that eventually, he would fade, just as he was supposed to after Molly died. Tell me, what was he like when he was with Hannibal?’

Walt listened to every word Bev said, and each one settled in his heart, his stomach is hollow, and his mind whirls like autumn leaves caught in the wind. Of course, he knew Will had been ill. He had been allowed to see him for short visits, he now realises probably only in good moments. He remembers curling up at the end of Will's feet and been carried away by Bev. He had thought Will just slept a lot, but now he realises they had protected him from the worst of it. He had never thought about why Will had survived. He had never really thought about what Will would do in the next few years. Will was always there. Walt now realises how much he has taken for granted.

'He was brighter, better,' Walt admits.

'You know the chances of that happening, of someone having gone through what Will went through and surviving, but then finding a new reason to live, a new connection to keep their heart from failing? It is almost unheard of. It's a miracle, and he gave it up, for you because it broke your heart. What about his heart, Walt? It cannot heal like yours. You can move on, carry on with your life, but what can Will do but fade away?'

'You are saying he'll die if he's not with Hannibal?'

'I am saying would you take the risk of losing someone who loves you so much they beat every odd given to them just to be with you? Would you throw away someone who loves you that much? I would give everything, as anyone would, to be loved that much by someone else. And what about Abigail? She understands you in a way few would. She has lost both her parents. She knows that pain intimately. She sounds like the other half of you, Walt. Why are you throwing all this away?'

'Because I don't know what my mother would say.'

'We carry the dead with us, Walt, in our hearts and our memories. I know your memories of your mother are brief, you were so young when she passed, but she is there. You look so much like her. She is in your eyes, your smile. The dead can speak if we listen. If you listen to her, really listen, I think you will find the answer you need.'

Chapter End Notes

Comments are the lamp Bedelia turns on in the darkness of Hannibal's room and kudos is Beverly's smile. xxx

The Kill

Chapter Summary

'You have a message, Sir,' Jimmy says, entering the darkness of Hannibal's chambers.

'What is it, Jimmy?' He says, irritated to be disturbed. He's stood by the window as he turns to face his servant. Nursing a whiskey, he's barely dressed. He hasn't left his room since Bedelia spoke to him. His mind clouded with thoughts of Will.

'Sorry to disturb you, Sir. The message is from Abigail,' Jimmy says, carefully entering the room.

Hannibal looks at him. 'Well,' he says impatiently. 'Was it about whoever was at the door?'

'Yes, it was Walt.'

Hannibal does not react, but his blood flows hotly. 'And?'

'He wanted to tell you both to know he is going after Will, to speak to him.'

Hannibal turns away from Jimmy and smiles. 'That will be all, Jimmy.'

'As you wish, Sir.'

Chapter Notes

So here we are at the end! Thank you so much my lovely band of readers. There is a small epilogue at the end for you.

I hope you enjoy it! xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Walt knocks on the main door of the house this time. He came straight from the park after speaking with Bev, realising that everyone was right. He needs to make amends for his actions. His love for his mother is still strong in his heart, but he now knows he loves Will. He can only imagine the strength it must have taken for Will to survive what he did and do so, not just for Molly but for Walt, something he had not thought about before this moment. So concerned about growing up, becoming a man, becoming someone worthy of Abigail, he

has forgotten himself. His mother would not approve of his treatment of Will or Hannibal, and he needs to take responsibility for that, and he needs to fight for Abi.

Eventually, it is Jimmy who opens the door. The servant's face drops when he sees Walt.

'I know she doesn't want to see me, and I imagine Hannibal doesn't either, but I need to see them. I need to explain,' Walt says, and Jimmy frowns. 'Please, I know I am asking a lot, and I know my behaviour has caused issues, but I want to make amends.'

'Stay here,' Jimmy says and shuts the door.

Walt begins to pace on the stoop, trying to hear if anyone is coming or if he is just going to be left on the doorstep. The door opens, and Abigail stands there. She still looks furious, but she also looks worried, her eyes are red, and she seems paler than usual.

'Firstly, I am sorry, Abi, more sorry than you could ever know, and I am going to make things right,' Walt says.

'Have you seen Will?'

'I am going there now; I wanted to let you know I am going to see Will and talk all of this through. I know I don't deserve another chance, but I am going to ask you for one.'

She folds her arms and stares. 'Make things right with Will, then we shall see.'

'That's all I ask. Can I see Hannibal?'

Abigail purses her lips and shakes her head. 'No, he is in no state thanks to you.'

'Can you tell him I am going to see Will? Tell him I am going to fix this. Even if you never forgive me, never take me back, and I lose you forever, I am still going to make things right between Hannibal and Will.'

'I am not sure you can,' Abigail says, her voice small, and it breaks Walt's heart.

'I am going to try,' he says.

'I'll tell him,' she says.

'Abi, I know I am not worthy of you, but I hope to be. I love you, and I hope you can wait just a little longer for me,' he says, and she looks away, biting her lip as of holding back the tears threatening to spill from her eyes. 'Remember, if nothing else, I love you, Abi.'

'Go, talk to Will,' she says and closes the door.

***

Every nerve in Will's body hurts. He is both surprised and not at how quickly the sickness has come on. By the time he was home, he was pale and sweating. Winston had to help him to bed. Now in the darkness of his room, he can still smell Hannibal. The alpha is on his skin. Still, his molecules have fused with his. There is no escaping him. He thinks about Walt, then hurt, the stinging words the boy had said. He sees Molly's face as if this sickness is also about her, that he has not beaten it all these years merely managed to live with it, and now he is relapsing. The one reason for carrying no longer needs him. In fact, he no longer loves or wants him. Hannibal had been his new reason. Hannibal had become everything. He had forgotten himself, his place in the world, his omeganess. He is biology and nothing more. He does not deserve happiness or love, not when the one thing he had to feel proud of, his ward, his son, hates him.

Hannibal's hurt face, his cold voice also taunts him. It's all he can hear. He wishes he could run back there, change everything, but he knows he can't. He is not worthy of such love, such consideration, such worship. His skin still bears the trails the alpha made; he can still feel the deft fingers as they explored his skin, his hole leaks with hot useless slick.

He tries to sleep, but his body just won't let him rest. It feels worse than last time. Even the grief is somehow deeper. Hannibal is still out there, able to choose another mate, be with someone other than Will. The thought takes such deep root inside himself that no matter how many times he tries to throw it up with the rest of his bile, it refuses to leave him. His body shakes, and the fever becomes worse as he heaves out nothing but bile. The pain wracks his body, and he screams with each burning nerve. He barely notices Winston, the doctor comes by and tries to give him something, but he refuses. He knows he has to go through it, or he will die. Right now, he hopes for death, an end. He wouldn't be anyone's burden or problem anymore. Walt could marry Abigail, and Hannibal could move on. He would just be a memory, a bad dream. He wishes for that more than he should.

'Sir, you must try to eat,' Winston says, placing a tray of food down on the bed. The smell of the toast turns Will's stomach, and he groans. Nausea crashes down on him again as he leans over the bed for the chamber pot, heaving up nothing. He realises it is morning again and groans. Yet another night spent in fits and fevers. His head is filled with daggers, and he winces at the light coming through the door. Winston closes it quietly. 'Let me call the for the doctor, Sir, I really must insist,' Winston says for the hundredth time. The faithful butler helps him sit up and mops his brow and mouth.

'No, Winston, there is nothing to be done,'

'I disagree, Sir, this is not like last time. You have taken a turn so suddenly, you look deathly pale, and you haven't eaten. Last night you were in and out of consciousness.'

'I am better today,' Will says, dry heaving again as the room once more begins to spin. 'Could you help me to lie flat?'

'First, try some water,' Winston says, bringing the glass to Will's dry, cracked lips. He manages a few drops before spluttering. Winston helps him lie down.

'I just need rest,' Will moans as his eyes close.

'You need the Count,' Winston says.

'I cannot change what has happened,' Will moans.

'I disagree. This situation does not have to be like this. Let me send for Walt. If he saw you in this condition, he would understand. He was too young the last time and wound too raw from his mother's death. He is a man now and needs to see what this has done to you.'

'No, he needs to move on, live his life, he has said how he feels,' Will closes his eyes and hopes for a moment of unconsciousness.

'None of this makes any sense to me,' Winston mutters as he mops Will's brow.

'I'm sorry to do this to you again, Winston,' Will says, his eyes half-open, looking at his faithful servant. In many ways the only friend he has ever had.

'At least let me send for Alana and Margot,' Winston pleads.

'No, if I survive, then I survive. If I don't, then I don't. There is nothing more to be said about it,' Will says and closes his eyes as another wave of pain hits his body.

***

By the time he had cleared being away from his work, gone to his Aunts, who were still furious with him but less so once he had told them his plan to go and speak to Will, it was getting dark. He had borrowed a horse from Margot, the fastest one and made the journey back to Trap Manor. As he left the city, his mind returned to Abigail, standing in the doorway, eyes red from crying. He tries to push the image away, but it is only replaced with that of his mother. Molly's beautiful singing voice when she sang to him as a child, the stories she would read of chivalry and honour, how he has disappointed her. He thought of those knights in those tales and how they would do anything for love, fight any dragon, slay any beast. What. Had he done for Abigail? Nothing but cause her pain. If she ever took him back, he vowed to spend the rest of his life honouring her, making her happy, doing anything for her.

The rain starts as he gets to the forest that border the Wolf and Trap estates. Soon is soaks through his summer cloak, and he starts to shiver. He keeps going, though, hoping the horse can see better than him as the raindrops thicken around him. The moonlight disappears, and it is so dark he can barely see in front of him. He knows these roads like the back of his hand and knows to trust his steed.

Just as he thinks this, the mare rears up, his grip on the reins slippery with the rain, and he easily slips off the horse onto the now wet and muddy road. The mare still rears up, making an awful screaming sound, a guttural terror he has never heard a horse make before. There seems to be something in the road, some kind of beast. He can only just about make it before

the mare falls on him, and he is trapped beneath its weight. His legs are being crushed as he tries to push himself from underneath. He hears a howl or a roar, some kind of ungodly noise. Then there is what he can only think of as a skull, an animal with long sharp teeth, dead eyes and blood dripping on him, warm and wet. He realises the blood must be from the now-dead mare. Just as he begins to scream, he is knocked by the skull and passes out.

***

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'What is it, Jimmy?' He says, irritated to be disturbed. He's stood by the window as he turns to face his servant. Nursing a whiskey, he's barely dressed. He hasn't left his room since Bedelia spoke to him. His mind clouded with thoughts of Will.

'Sorry to disturb you, Sir. The message is from Abigail,' Jimmy says, carefully entering the room.

Hannibal looks at him. 'Well,' he says impatiently. 'Was it about whoever was at the door?'

'Yes, it was Walt.'

Hannibal does not react, but his blood flows hotly. 'And?'

'He wanted to tell you both to know he is going after Will, to speak to him.'

Hannibal turns away from Jimmy and smiles. 'That will be all, Jimmy.'

'As you wish, Sir.'

***

Will stares out of his bedroom window as the rain falls, beating against pane with a deafening insistence. He closes his eyes as the presence behind him forms, arms encircling him, a mouth nuzzling him, hands lifting his nightgown, light scraping the flesh of his thighs. He groans and leans back into the cold solidly behind him. Slick leaks down his leg, burning his flesh as he feels his arousal grow. Opening his eyes, he sees the slick darkness reflected in the glass of the window. Antlers reaching up to the ceiling, skin so matt black it's like looking beyond the blackest night. The hand that scrapes up his thigh finds his aching, needing hole. He can feel the slim fingernail as it enters him, scraping, hurting, finding. He moans and leans back, desperate for more as another hand encircles his cock. He thrusts into the palm, the cool, slick black only making him moan louder.

He longs for this creature. He lets go and allows the creature to enter him, filling him, thrusting inside him, scraping its hands down his chest, ripping the nightgown from him, tatters fluttering to the floor. Blood leaks down his chest, his thighs, everywhere. He burns and bleeds. Slick is thick and molten as he is filled up by the creature then moans his name. He knows this creature. He wants this creature. They are one and the same, two halves of a perfect whole. He comes, over and over. It never stops. Wave after wave of pleasure, it

threatens to burn him up completely. He wants it to. He needs it to. He screams when the creature's fangs press and burst through his skin, sucking his blood, tasting his flesh.

Will wakes up to the sound of rain. He is sweating still, and the sheets are covered in his cum and slick. He groans. He is awake, though, which is good, he supposed. He manages to swing his legs out of bed. Looking around, he cannot see Winston. The servant must have left to get some rest. He doesn't blame him. Will had been bad all day and most of the night, from what he can remember. He stands and makes his way to the window. Opening the curtains, he can see its dark once more. There is no moon or stars as the rain had blotted them out. He can feel a pull before, an itch, a need. He can see something moving from the open gates, something moving fast.

He leans forward but cannot make it out. He grabs his dressing gown and puts it on. He makes his way out of his room and down the stairs to the door. He is not thinking about why he can walk now, why he can think, why he is not wracked with agony. The only thought he has, that he must get to the door. He does not even think about calling for Winston. He just runs down the stairs, unbolts the door and opens it.

Hannibal stands there, dripping wet, in his arms, pale and muddy, is Walt.

***

Will pushes Hannibal and the alpha grunts putting up no resistance as Will pins him against the now closed bedroom door. His strength all but returned to him in the short time he had been in Hannibal's presence. He curses his biology at how easy it is satiated as his mind is still haunted by the image of Hannibal carrying Walt's limp body. Will had dragged Hannibal to his bedroom, needing to be alone with the alpha, his biology taking over.

'What happened?' Will all but growls as he presses his hands against Hannibal's broad chest, water and blood drip from the alpha. Will can smell the blood, muss, and pheromones as they seep into his bones.

'There is much to explain,' Hannibal says as he visibly sniffs Will, which makes him simultaneously furious and turned on. He can feel slick leaking from him as an unwanted moan leaves his lips.

'Explain,' Will grunts.

'You need to come with me,' Hannibal says and grasps Will's hands tightly. 'Now.'

Will tries to remove his hands from Hannibal's hold, but he can't. He finally looks into the alpha's eyes, red pools of almost black now, flecked with gold. He wants to get lost in them just as he did before. 'Where?'

'I need to show you something.'

'I can't leave Walt,' Will says as Hannibal begins pushing him back into the room.

'He will be fine. I have set his leg and ribs. Winston is with him now. You need to get dressed and come with me.'

'Why?'

'I need to show you something.'

'I'm not going anywhere.'

Hannibal growls then and releases Will's hands, taking a step away from him. Will's hands are still burning from the touch. 'You feel better. Now I am here,' Hannibal says.

Will wishes he could say no, but instead just nods.

'You must stay with me. I am going to finish what I started, and I need you to come with me to see that you can trust me. I brought Walt here, didn't I? I could have left him to die out there.'

Will is seething with rage now, his whole body shakes with fury, and before he even realises what he is doing, he launches himself at Hannibal, who stumbles back and hits the door again.

'If you had, I would have killed you myself,' Will growls as he presses his whole body against Hannibal once more. He hates how they fit together so perfectly, how his muscles, even in his rage, have relaxed, and the pain from his burning nerves has been soothed to a comforting warmth. The fact that Hannibal senses his effect on the omega makes it even more humiliating.

'I am aware, but that wasn't the only reason I didn't,' Hannibal is smiling, his fangs sharp and deliciously pointed. Will wishes he could not remember what they felt like against his skin.

'What was the reason?'

'I wanted to protect him. I wanted to protect you. I need you to know me, to see me, to see us.' Will wishes his body would not betray him, but it does. Those words sear into him, and he moans again. Slick is once more forming, and his body is buzzing in that way that only Hannibal has ever made it. 'I want you to know that I see you. You don't have to hide from me.'

'Hannibal, you need to leave. This doesn't change anything.'

'Come with me now, that's all I ask, come with me, and if you still want me to leave, then I will, and you will never see me again.'

Will can see in Hannibal's eyes that the alpha is serious, that he will not take no for an answer.

'Fine.'

***

Will follows Hannibal closely as they ride through the rain. The memory of what he saw that night when the soldier was killed resurfaces, and he knows he saw Hannibal just like this, dressed in dark clothes riding down the drive. He knows that Hannibal hunted down that soldier and killed him because he treated Abigail. He knows it in his bones. He should be repulsed. He should turn his horse around and ride back to Trap Manor. He wonders about Mason, was that Hannibal too? Even as these questions swirl in his mind, he follows Hannibal. He knows he would follow this alpha straight to hell, and the thought both thrills and terrifies him.

They make their way to the outskirts of the forest between the two estates. Will can see the corpse of Walt's horse on the road, and he shudders. Hannibal stops his horse, and Will follows suit. They both dismount, Will looks at the poor dead mare, throat cut out, blood swirling with the rainwater. She never stood a chance.

Hannibal leans in close to Will. The driving rain and wind make it hard for him to hear as Hannibal talks into his ear. 'We need to leave the horses here. They can't make it through the woods.'

Will looks at Hannibal. He wants to ask a million questions. None of them leaves his lips. 'We can't just leave them in the rain,' Will says.

'We won't be long. They'll be fine. We can tie them in the woods, under the trees.'

Will nods and follows Hannibal into the woods, where they find a convenient tree to tie the horses' reigns to. Once done, Hannibal nods to Will and begins walking into the forest. Will sighs and follows him. Inside the woods, the rain is slightly less, the wind still howls through the trees, there is no light, he can barely see his hand in front of his face. Hannibal seems to be able to see fine, making his way confidently through the thick woodland with only occasional glances back to Will.

They walk for what seems like hours, getting deeper and deeper into the woods, and Will is worried they will never be able to find their way back out. Eventually, Hannibal stops turning around. He motions for Will to crouch to the ground, Will moves next to the alpha and joins him crouched in the undergrowth. He cannot see anything at first as he wipes rainwater from his eyes. He hears it, though, a rustling movement. Then he sees a flash of white, a skeleton almost, no a skull, long and with bright, sharp teeth. It is attached to a body that moves unnaturally on all fours like an animal, but it's not quite right. It takes Will a moment to realise it is a man, covered in furs wearing an animal skull. He gasps.

'What?' Will whispers.

Hannibal shushes him. 'This is who hurt Walt, who killed those people and who killed Mason.'

Will looks at the pitiful creature and shakes his head. 'How? Why?'

'He is an old patient of mine. He believes himself to be a predator. It took me some months of tracking to find his lair. He believes himself to be safe here. We can surprise him.'

'What? What do you mean?'

'He hurt Walt. He would have killed him had I not intervened.'

'What are you saying?'

'You have killed before to protect the boy. You will not be alone this time,' Hannibal says, and Will cannot believe what he is hearing.

'Francis,' Will says.

Hannibal reaches a cold, wet hand to Will's face. 'I could see it the moment I saw you. We are one and the same. Not just alpha and omega. So much more, we could be so much more.'

'He could kill us easily with those teeth, even if there is two of us.'

Hannibal smiles and removes from his pocket two daggers, gleamingly sharp. Will cannot help but smile. His eyes go to the man in the clearing. He closes his eyes and imagines this beast hurting Walt, killing that horse, and he can feel the cold rage in his heart, the need that has been there ever since he killed Francis, bubbling under the surface, is boiling now, and he looks back at Hannibal and nods.

Chapter End Notes

comments are Will's hands pressed up against Hannibal's chest and kudos are the moans that keep leaving Will's unwilling yet willing lips xxx

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A little happily murderous ever after for you...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Epilogue

One year later...

Will wakes to the sound of rain on the windowpane and smiles. Hannibal's body closely wrapped around him, barely a millimetre between them, the heat of the alpha always soothing. He tries to move, stretch out his limbs, but Hannibal just pulls him tighter. They are still connected. Though Hannibal's knot has deflated, they fell asleep at some point last night still joined. This is Will's third heat with Hannibal and the alpha's second rut. The first had been after they killed Randall Tier that night. When Will closes his eyes, he can still feel and see the memory of it. They have killed together just once since. A man of questionable character who had recently moved to the village. He had stolen things and bothered people at the local pub. Walt has mentioned it on one of his and Abigail's visits to the house with the grandchildren. The man had scared little Mischa, and that was enough to push Hannibal over the edge. If he was honest, Will had been feeling the itch grow in him for some kind.

He still cannot quite believe this is his life. He is in this huge bed with an alpha he has not only bonded with, married but also can be his true self for the first time in his life. After that night, they had told each other everything. Will had told Hannibal how he had killed his father after too many beatings and ran away to find a better life. How he had planned and executed the death of Francis Dolarhyde, how Molly has helped him bury the body.

Hannibal had told him of all his kills. All the reasons, some more justified than others. Will had seen in Hannibal that creature from his dreams, and it made him shiver with arousal. They had never been apart since, always together, always bonded.

Abigail and Walt had married that autumn, and the twins adopted orphans who Margot had found through her charity work had quickly followed. Mischa and Molly were as beautiful as they were excitable. They had moved into Trap Manor, and the house was once more filled with laughter. Bev had even returned as a nurse to the girls. Will had realised how much he had missed her the moment she hugged him in the doorway as if no time at all had passed. Hannibal and Will spent most of their time at Wolf Estate but with lots of visits from Walt,

Abigail and the girls. Winston has stayed with Will, of course, but enjoyed having Walt so close. It had all worked out as Hannibal had wanted.

‘You are thinking again,’ Hannibal mumbles into Will’s shoulder, pressing his fangs against the skin.

‘Of all the good things, my love,’ Will says and smiles. ‘Of all the good things.’

‘You are not planning on leaving this bed, I hope,’ Hannibal says, and Will can feel the alpha’s cock rising once more. His heat is waning, but it doesn’t take much encouragement from the alpha for that need to return. Once Will would have been ashamed or scared of his nature, he now closes his eyes and breathes in their combined scents. He moans and presses back against his mate. ‘I have plans for you.’

Will smiles. ‘Do tell.’

‘I want to see that blush again,’ Hannibal says, and Will laughs.

Chapter End Notes

comments are Will's blushes and kudos is Hannibal's need to see them!

End Notes

comments and kudos are so appreciated and loved! I am nervous about this one! More soon. I have a lot written and I am close to the end so please keep with me. Hope to post weekly xxx

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!